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TO

WILLIAM DAVID SCHERMERHORN

MY FORMER PUPIL AND PRESENT ASSOCIATE
A MAN OF JOHANNINE EXPERIENCE AND LIFE

Gift from Mrs. J. A. Glendinning 3-7-58

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FOREWORD

AT the close of our volume on Paul and His Epistles we said that John was the greatest theologian of the apostolic times; and, while we recognized that the Pauline influence had dominated the thought and life of the church at large, and we believed that it ought to do so until the missionary and evangelistic work of the church was done, we prophesied that then the Johannine theology would be the supreme influence in the days of the church's edification and consummation in love. That prophecy indicates our estimate of the final position to be accorded the apostle John. We believe that as the church grows in grace and becomes more and more like its Lord it will more and more agree with him that John is the disciple most worthy of its love.

There is a disposition at the present time with a certain class of writers to emphasize the dependence of John upon Paul, and these writers try to make it appear that the author of the Johannine books was a disciple of Paul even more fully than he was a disciple of Jesus. We believe that John always was a receptive soul and that he probably learned much from Paul, as from every other strong personality with whom he came into contact, but the supreme influence in all his more mature life was that of the Master. For the most part he was one of the quiet in the land, and he stood nearest to the Master, and he saw deepest into the Master's spirit and truth, and he meditated longest upon these things, and in the end he formulated more fully than any other the essentials of the new faith; and as far as he went we believe that he has spoken the final word in this field.

Paul was taught by the Spirit, but John had had the additional advantage of the three years of teaching by the Incarnate Lord. After Pentecost the Spirit of Jesus led him into all the truth. His personal experience and the history of the church taught him "new significance and fresh result" from many of his early memories of the Master's teaching and life. At last he was prepared to write the consummation of the New Testament revelation, the final residuum of the first century's experience in the origin and the development of Christian truth. After Peter had been crucified and Paul had been beheaded, John was left to carry on the work and to perfect the faith for another entire generation in the church. What Jesus had taught in the first third of the century and what Peter and Paul had preached in the second third of the century John meditated upon through the last third of the century, and in this period he wrote the epistles, the Apocalypse, and the Gospel. They represent the highest reach of apostolic inspiration.

This book will be perfect anathema in the eyes of those who are accustomed to treat the Johannine literature as anonymous or pseudonymous, and to regard the contents of these books as composed mainly of "such stuff as dreams are made of." We believe that the church tradition is veracious and trustworthy which assigns the authorship of the five Johannine books to the apostle John. We believe that the fourth Gospel is no romance, to be interpreted either allegorically or rationalistically. We believe in its historical trustworthiness, and we follow the apostle John as our supreme authority both as to fact and to faith.

There was the old parallel of the two pictures of Socrates given us in the *Memorabilia* of Xenophon on the one hand and the *Dialogues* of Plato on the other, with the two pictures of Jesus furnished us by the synoptic Gospels on the one hand and the fourth Gospel on the other. It used to be a commonplace of criticism to affirm that the former

picture in the two cases was the prosaic, historical, and reliable one, while the latter was poetical, idealistic, and imaginative. It is interesting to see that there is a tendency at present among the classical scholars to revise that opinion and to believe that Plato, after all, has given us the truer picture of the great master; and we confidently expect that the final judgment in the case of the Gospels will be favorable to the greater value of that presentation of the Master's life and teaching which belongs to the one who loved him most and served him longest upon the earth.

As his Gospel is better than any one of the synoptics, so we regard his first epistle as better than any one of the epistles of Paul. The difference in their writings marks the difference in the men. Paul is the greatest of the scribes, learned in the law; John is the greatest of the seers, learned in love. Paul deals with syllogisms; John deals with intuitions. Paul argues and convinces; John sees and declares. Paul is an advocate; John is a prophet. Paul proves with inevitable logic; John proclaims with irrefutable insight. Paul's proofs press upon each other like waves dashing over fortifications of sand on the beach. John's thought moves calmly and majestically like the ripples which spread outward in ever-widening circles till they are lost to sight, when you drop a pebble into the dimpling surface of the sleeping lake.

Paul's epistles are treatises, arguing from premises to conclusions in logical order and formal structure. John's epistles are serenely unconscious of system and superior to formal argument. John makes confident affirmation of truth which he is sure will be self-attesting. He only has to utter it and let it stand. His sentences are like the Sequoia of the Pacific Coast, every one a giant which stands alone. Great spiritual intuitions are expressed with uttermost simplicity in giant sublimity of strength. The genius of John is most in evidence in the ease with which he unites the historical with the ideal, grasps the meaning

FOREWORD

of all phenomena, and sees the ultimate truth behind the surface event in the Apocalypse, the epistle, and the Gospel.

Paul wrote thirteen of the New Testament books; John wrote only five. Paul confined himself to the writing of epistles; John in his five books has given us three distinct types of literature. Our New Testament divides into historical, epistolary, and apocalyptic books; and in each of the two former divisions John represents the highest type, while in the latter he furnishes the only example. Each of these writings seems well-nigh perfect in its kind, and yet they all supplement and complement each other most wonderfully.

In the Gospel, John shows us Jesus in the flesh, in the epistles he pictures Christ in the heart, and in the Apocalypse he reveals Jesus the Christ as the Lord of heaven. In the Gospel we find the historical Jesus, in the epistles the Jesus of Christian experience, and in the Apocalypse Jesus the Lord of all and the King of glory. In the Gospel we have the fundamentals of the Christian's faith, in the epistles the fundamentals of the Christian's life and love, while in the Apocalypse we find the foundation of the Christian's undying hope. In the Gospel John is a historian, in the epistles a pastor, in the Apocalypse a seer—and in all his writings a Christian prophet and theologian beyond compare. Others may have been dominant in the past. Others may rule in the present. The future belongs to John. He increasingly will come to his own.

PART I

THE APOSTLE JOHN

PART I

THE APOSTLE JOHN

I. JOHN THE LITTLE KNOWN

WE know very little about the apostle John. To most people it is a matter of surprise to discover how meager our information is concerning so important a member of the apostolic band.

Ask the average New Testament student whether we know much about the apostle John, and in all probability he will reply: "O, yes, the pages of the Gospels are full of information concerning him. He wrote five of the books of our New Testament, almost a fifth of the whole number and filling about one fifth of the volume in space." Then we turn to the Gospels and we find to our surprise that John's name occurs in them only twenty times in all, and that in more than half of these occurrences there is the mere mention of the name and little or no information is given us concerning the man.

Ask the average student of the New Testament whether we know more about John the Baptist or John the apostle, and in all probability he will reply: "We know very little about John the Baptist, except that he was the forerunner of Jesus and that he was beheaded early in the Lord's ministry; but John the apostle was one of the first disciples of Jesus, and became his most intimate friend through all his ministry, and then outlived all the other apostles. He had a long and most influential career, and we know much more about him than we do about John the Baptist."

Then we turn to the Gospels to find if this is true, and we discover that in the Gospel according to Matthew, John

the Baptist is mentioned twenty-three times and John the Apostle only three times. In each of these three times Matthew mentions John simply as the brother of James, and he tells us seven times as much about John the Baptist as he does about the brother of James. In the Gospel according to Mark, John the Baptist is mentioned sixteen times and John the apostle only ten times. In the Gospel according to Luke the Baptist is mentioned twenty-four times and the apostle only seven times. In the fourth Gospel John the Baptist is mentioned twenty times and the name of John the apostle is not found in the book from beginning to end.

Even when we pass over into the Book of the Acts, written about events occurring long years after the death of John the Baptist and while John the apostle was still living and active in the building up of the church, and in which, therefore, we might expect John the Baptist to fall entirely out of notice while John the apostle would become prominent and predominant in the affairs recorded, we find to our surprise that John the Baptist is mentioned by name nine times in the book and John the apostle only the same number of times. It would seem, then, that in the minds of the writers of the historical books of our New Testament John the Baptist was a far more important personality than the apostle John. The Gospels mention the Baptist more than four times as often as they mention the apostle; and if we include the Book of Acts we find that all the historical books of the New Testament make John the Baptist more than three times as prominent as the apostle John.

We know much more about Peter and we know much more about Paul than we know about John. Peter and Paul are great talkers, both of them; and they are both capable of considerable self-advertisement upon occasion. They tell us a great deal about themselves. They could have written very readable and interesting autobiographies,

and both of them would have thoroughly enjoyed the task. John would not have enjoyed it. He was a man of another type. He talked little about anything and not at all about himself. If anybody else were present to do the talking, he kept still. He liked to associate with Peter for that reason, as well as for other things. Peter was perfectly willing to keep the conversation going at any length and at any time. If anything needed to be said on any occasion when Peter was present, he always felt sure that he was the providentially designated individual to say it, and John always was ready to allow Peter to assume all responsibility along that line. Peter was garrulous to the limit; John was reticent to a fault.

If Peter's wife's mother lay sick with a fever and you called at his home, Peter would tell you all about it, all the preliminary symptoms and all the progress of the disease, all the remedies which had been tried and all which the neighbors had suggested, all that the doctor had said about the case and all that Peter himself thought about it. He would take it for granted that you were as concerned in his mother-in-law as he himself was, and that the thing which was uppermost in his interest at that moment would be equally interesting to you; and people always liked Peter, and they usually enjoyed hearing him talk. On the other hand, if John's mother, Salome, lay sick with a fever and you knew nothing about it when you called at their home, John would receive you and talk with you about other matters and allow you to make your call and go away again without saying a word to you about his mother's illness; and when you heard of it through the neighbors afterward you would be likely to think that John was a queer fellow and unduly close-mouthed, and that he had been a little less than cordial in not telling you, an old friend of the family, something at least about it.

That was the sort of man John was. We learn from the other evangelists that his mother Salome was one of the

women who accompanied Jesus in his itinerant ministry and that as he ministered to others she ministered to him and his followers from her own substance. The other evangelists tell us that she was present at the crucifixion and again at the resurrection; and we learn from their narratives that she was one of the most faithful and devoted among the women disciples of Jesus. John writes a whole Gospel, setting forth the life of our Lord, and he never once mentions Salome's name. That is characteristic of him. He will not talk about himself or his family. After the crucifixion Mary the mother of Jesus became a member of the family of John and probably for that reason her name never is mentioned in the fourth Gospel. Mark mentions her name once and Matthew five times and Luke thirteen times, but in the fourth Gospel she is called "his mother" and once only "the mother of Jesus," but her name is not found in the narrative from beginning to end. John makes her share in the anonymity of his entire family.

Suppose we had gone to the apostle Paul and told him that some of his enemies had called him a liar, what would Paul have answered us? In all probability he would have said: "They say that I am a weakling and a liar, do they? Well, who are they? I appeal to my record and my reputation and I challenge comparison with theirs." "Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they the seed of Abraham? So am I. Are they ministers of Christ? (I speak as one beside himself) I more; in labors more abundantly, in prisons more abundantly, in stripes above measure, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received I forty *stripes* save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day have I been in the deep; *in* journeyings often, *in* perils of rivers, *in* perils of robbers, *in* perils from *my* countrymen, *in* perils from the Gentiles, *in* perils in the city, *in* perils in the wilderness, *in* perils in the sea, *in* perils among false brethren; *in* labor and travail,

in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. Beside those things that are without, there is that which presseth upon me daily, anxiety for all the churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? who is caused to stumble, and I burn not? If I must needs glory, I will glory of the things that concern my weakness. The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, he who is blessed forevermore, knoweth that I lie not.”¹ We are almost glad that somebody called the apostle Paul a liar, for in answer he has poured forth a whole paragraph of autobiography, giving many facts of which we would have had no knowledge if it had not been for this provocation.

Now suppose we go to the apostle John and tell him that his enemies declare that he is a liar and that his Gospel is not the gospel of truth. What will we hear in answer? Will he pour forth a torrent of self-vindication in paragraph after paragraph of autobiography? No, that would not be characteristic of John. He will not condescend to defend himself. He will not even condescend to defend the truth. He simply will state it again and call it the truth and assert that such it self-evidently is; and he will remark quietly that those enemies we have been quoting to him are children of the devil and Antichrists and liars themselves. In characterizing them he may be more outspoken than the apostle Paul; but he will say never a word about himself.

Probably he would say something like this, “I have not written unto you because ye know not the truth, but because ye know it, and because no lie is of the truth. Who is the liar, but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, even he who denieth the Father and the Son.² In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his

¹ See 2 Cor. ii. 22-31.

² 1 John 2, 21, 22.

brother."³ The only satisfaction we would get from telling John that his enemies declared that his Gospel was a lie would be the hearing of the repetition of his gospel truth. We would hear nothing about himself. On that subject his lips would be tightly sealed.

John has written five books of our New Testament, but in those five books his own name occurs only five times; and all of these occurrences of his name are in the book of Revelation, and they tell us very little about the man beyond the fact that the visions there recorded were granted to him. Here, then, is one good reason why we know so little about the apostle John. Though he had abundant opportunity to tell us about himself, he absolutely refuses to do it. He is as reticent in all matters of autobiographical detail as was the Master himself. Like the Master, he belonged to the quiet in the land. He never sounded his own trumpet. His voice was not heard in the streets.

However, though the Master never wrote anything about himself, we know very much about him, because others thought it worth while to preserve a record of his doings and sayings. Why do not the other Gospel writers tell us more about the apostle John? It would be safe to say that the New Testament tells us five times as much about Peter as it does about John. Why is this? Because all of the New Testament writers liked Peter with all of his faults. The Gospel according to Mark was written by one who was Peter's constant companion and friend in much of his ministry and one who looked upon Peter as his spiritual father in the gospel. We naturally would expect a Gospel narrative written by such a man to make Peter especially prominent. We find the same prominence given to Peter in the other synoptic Gospels and in the book of Acts; and Peter is mentioned oftener in the fourth Gospel than

³ 1 John 3. 10.

John is mentioned in the four Gospels put together. The fact of the case is that Mark and Matthew and Luke and John all admired and loved the impetuous and faulty but loyal-hearted Peter, while neither Matthew nor Mark nor Luke admired or loved John in the same degree.

It would be safe to say that in the book of Acts Paul's name is mentioned ten times as often as the name of John, and the reason is not far to seek. The book of Acts was written by a man who was the constant companion and close friend of the apostle Paul for many years, and to him Paul was the greatest hero in the early history of the church. He admired and loved Paul with a singular devotion; he did not admire or love John in anything like the same degree. It never occurred to Luke that John ever was or would be of such service to the Christian Church as Paul had been and would be. Luke did not care particularly for the apostle John; and he does not seem to have been a favorite with any of the other writers of the New Testament historical books.

Peter liked John. Peter could get along with anybody, and he liked everybody. If he had written a Gospel with his own hand, I think John would have played a more important part in it than in any of the Gospels we have. Then, too, John was a favorite with Jesus. If the Master had written a Gospel, John would have occupied a larger place in it than any other of the apostolic band. A Gospel written by Jesus would have concerned itself more with spiritual affinities and less with external incidents or spectacular occurrences than our Gospels do. In such a Gospel Peter would have had less room and John would have come to the front and have occupied his rightful place close to the Master's side. Here, then, is a second reason why we are told so little about the apostle John in our New Testament books. The writers of those books either did not appreciate him at his true worth or they cherished an active feeling of dislike for him in their hearts.

II. JOHN THE UNRECORDED AND DISREGARDED

It has been said that the synoptic writers never mention John specifically except to find fault with him. It is true that the only time John is mentioned alone in the synoptic Gospels is when we are told that he reported to Jesus that he had forbidden a man to cast out devils in the Master's name because the man did not follow them, and Jesus rebuked his spirit of intolerance and told him he had made a mistake and that henceforth he never should forbid anyone who was doing good whether he trained in their camp or not.⁴ It is also true that the only times the two brothers, James and John, are mentioned alone are when we read that they wanted to call down fire upon the village of the Samaritans because they were inhospitable to Jesus, and Jesus turned upon them and rebuked them,⁵ and that other time when they came with their mother to ask for the chief seats in the Kingdom and the rest of the apostles were moved with reasonable and righteous indignation at their selfish attempt.⁶ The Master rebuked their desire for lordship and refused their request and told them they did not know what they asked. These three rebukes for the spirit of selfishness and the spirit of revenge and the spirit of intolerance are all that the synoptics have seen fit to record of the apostle John and his individual relationship to the Lord.

They mention the fact that Peter and John were sent together to prepare for the passover meal.⁷ They tell us that Peter, James, and John were present with the Lord on three occasions when the remainder of the apostolic band were not admitted to the same intimacy: at the raising of the daughter of Jairus,⁸ at the transfiguration,⁹ and in the garden of Gethsemane.¹⁰ They record the call to

⁴ Mark 9. 38; Luke 9. 49.

⁸ Mark 5. 37.

⁵ Luke 9. 52-55.

⁹ Mark 9. 2.

⁶ Mark 10. 35-41; Matt. 20. 20-24.

¹⁰ Mark 14. 33.

⁷ Luke 22. 18.

continuous ministry of the two pairs of brothers, Peter and Andrew with James and John.¹¹ Mark tells us that these four had private conversation with the Master concerning the last things.¹²

In the four lists of the apostles given in the New Testament the name of John is mentioned, and always among the first four though usually the last of the four—Peter and Andrew and James and John.¹³ This is all the synoptic Gospels have to tell us about John. They mention him usually only in groups of the apostles, and then always in a subordinate position as the brother of James or the companion of Peter, or of James, or of Peter and James; and whenever he is isolated from the apostolic group it is to show him ignorant and mistaken and deserving and receiving the Master's rebuke. It does seem that in these writers there was some personal animus against the apostle John which led them either to ignore him as much as possible in their narratives or to record only those incidents in which he had been found worthy of blame.

If we turn to the fourth Gospel for added information concerning John, we find that his name is not mentioned in the book from beginning to end. That name simply drops out of the narrative, and whether for praise or blame the personality of the apostle John is concealed as far as the facts will allow. We are told that the sons of Zebedee went fishing with Peter on the sea of Tiberias and were in the group to whom the risen Lord appeared,¹⁴ but that is the nearest approach in the whole Gospel to any definite identification of the apostle John with the events narrated. Peter is just as prominent in this Gospel as in any other. We have long conversations of Jesus with Nathanael and Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman and Andrew and

¹¹ Mark 1. 19, 20; Matt. 4. 21, 22; Luke 5. 8-11.

¹² Mark 13. 3-5.

¹³ Mark 3. 16-19; Matt. 10. 2-4; Luke 6. 14-16; Acts 1. 13.

¹⁴ John 21. 2.

Philip and Judas not Iscariot. The Lord seems to have talked freely with these individuals and with the group of the disciples and with the multitudes again and again; but as far as this narrative is concerned he might seem never to have had a word with the apostle John alone. No conversation between these two is recorded in this book.

There are three short sentences in the fourth Gospel which may have been spoken by John. If we decide that he was the unnamed disciple who with Andrew first left John the Baptist to follow after Jesus, he may have been the one who asked Jesus, "Rabbi, . . . where abidest thou?"¹⁵ It would seem more probable, however, that Andrew was the spokesman on this occasion and that John was silent, as usual, and allowed his companion to speak for both. If we identify John as that disciple who reclined at the table during the Last Supper in the position nearest the Lord, then he was the one who asked concerning the betrayer, "Lord, who is it?"¹⁶ However, we read that that question was put into his mouth by Peter and really belonged to Peter himself. If we conclude that John was the disciple whom Jesus loved, mentioned four times in this Gospel and nowhere else in the New Testament, then he was the one who said to Peter when that stranger called to them from the shore of the sea of Tiberias, "It is the Lord."¹⁷

These three short sentences are the only ones we can assign to the apostle John with any probability; and of the three only the last would seem to be his own in any true sense or with any degree of certainty. It consists of three short words in the Greek, 'Ο κύριος ἐστιν, but those three words summarize the aim of the entire Gospel and express the whole endeavor of John's writing and life—to point

¹⁵ John 1. 38.

¹⁶ John 13. 25.

¹⁷ John 21. 7.

out, to call attention to, and to identify Jesus as Lord. At the beginning of the Gospel stands John the Baptist saying, "Behold, the Lamb of God!" and at the close of the Gospel stands the apostle John saying, "It is the Lord." That is all John says in the fourth Gospel. It is the whole of his gospel message to men. Peter talks much in this Gospel, as in all of the others, and many more of the disciples say many things. John says only three words; and this fourth Gospel represents him as the same quiet, silent, listening, unobtrusive, and seemingly subordinate and unimportant individual the synoptics had pictured for us.

Nevertheless, it tells us one new thing about him which we never might have suspected from their narratives. We gathered from them that the other evangelists did not like John very well. We learn from the fourth Gospel that Jesus loved him more than he loved any other man. That fact in itself discloses more concerning John's inner character than the record of many sayings and incidents might have done.

In the book of Acts the name of John appears in connection with two narratives only. We are told that he was with Peter at the gate of the temple when the lame man was healed, and afterward was brought with Peter before the Sanhedrin,¹⁸ but here, as always, Peter is the spokesman and the prominent character and John is associated with him as a silent and sympathetic companion. In the eighth chapter we are told how Peter and John went down into Samaria to take care of the converts resulting from Philip's evangelistic campaign,¹⁹ and John must have taken his share in the preaching and the ministry of those days; but all of the recorded talking is done by Peter, and John seems simply to have stood by and to have assisted as need required. The prominent figures in the book of Acts are Peter and Paul, Stephen and Philip, Barnabas, Silas, and

¹⁸ Acts 3. 1 to 4. 22.

¹⁹ Acts 8. 14-25.

Timothy, James the brother of Jesus, Apollos, Aquila, and Priscilla. John seems to be of secondary importance still.

Once again the name of John is mentioned. In the Epistle to the Galatians Paul says that James and Cephas and John were reputed to be pillars of the church at Jerusalem when Barnabas and he visited there.²⁰ Then John drops out of notice in the New Testament until we come to the book of Revelation,²¹ where his name occurs five times as the seer and the writer of the visions there recorded.

III. JOHN IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

We now have outlined all the sources of information concerning the life of the apostle John, and we have seen how surprisingly meager is the information which these sources furnish us. Upon the basis of the few facts they supply we will attempt to construct his biography. We do not know where or when he was born. Possibly his birthplace was Bethsaida. We know that Philip was from Bethsaida and that this was the city of Peter and Andrew.²² We know that James and John were associated with Peter and Andrew in the fishing business at the time of their call to the discipleship with Jesus.²² It would be natural to suppose that business partners would be fellow townsmen. If so, then five of our Lord's apostles—and the five always mentioned first in our New Testament lists of the apostles—were from the same provincial town.

[Not one of the apostles was called from the city of Jerusalem. All of the first preachers of the gospel were country bred.] The Lord seemed to consider that the best arrangement in the beginning, and the Lord seems to consider that the best arrangement to-day. The country still furnishes us our preachers. It is notorious that city churches are for

²⁰ Gal. 2. 9.

²¹ John 1. 44.

²² Luke 5. 10.

the most part ministerially barren; but that is nothing new in the history of the Christian Church. City pulpits always have been filled with country lads. The country has supplied the city with religious as well as other leadership. All indications would seem to point to either Bethsaida or Capernaum as the probable birthplace and home of the apostle John, and of these two Bethsaida seems the more likely.

The name "John," Ἰωάνης, is Greek and represents the Hebrew, יְהוֹחָנָן, Jehochanan, or יוֹחָנָן, Jochanan, which means, "Jehovah is gracious." It has a modern equivalent in the German name, Gotthold.

We know the names of four members of the family. James probably was an older brother, since his name usually precedes that of John when the two are mentioned together. The father's name was Zebedee and the mother's name was Salome. The family probably was well to do. We think this for several reasons: 1. They had hired servants.²³ They belonged to the employer class, and that must have meant that they had an assured income and some capital. 2. Salome was one of the women who ministered unto Jesus of their substance.²⁴ That must have meant that she had money to give away, means sufficient to permit her to be benevolent and to help to provide the necessities for the apostolic band. 3. She was one of the women who bought spices and came to anoint Jesus in the tomb.²⁵ Her purse was still open; her means had not been exhausted by all her previous giving.

4. It may be that John was known to the high priest and had the right of entrance into the high priest's court and was able to bring Peter in to see the trial of Jesus there.²⁶ If John was the "other disciple" mentioned in this connection, this personal acquaintance with the high priest and his household may be an indication of a higher social

²³ Mark 1. 20.

²⁵ Mark 16. 1.

²⁴ Luke 8. 3; Mark 15. 41.

²⁶ John 18. 15, 16.

rank than that of the other apostles. Such acquaintance-ship is more possible at least to the prosperous middle class than to the very poor. 5. At the cross Jesus gave his mother into John's keeping, and we read that John took her unto his own home.²⁷ If the statement that John took Mary unto his own home "from that hour" is to be interpreted literally, it must mean that John had a home in Jerusalem at this time. A Galilæan fisherman could not have left his business for some years and then have acquired property in Jerusalem unless he had some independent fortune to draw upon.

To these five indications of some superior standing and wealth we possibly may add, as a sixth, the request which Salome made for her sons that they might sit, one on the right hand and one on the left hand, in the Lord's kingdom.²⁸ Why should she suggest that any preeminence be granted to them? They do not appear to have been pre-eminent in influence or in service, according to the narratives in our Gospels. What right had she or they to set up any claim to preeminent honor in the days of the coming triumph of the Messiah-King? Could it be that they regarded themselves as belonging to the aristocracy among the disciples of the Lord? Did they consider themselves of a superior social rank, sufficient to guarantee their right to lord it over the rest a little, or at least to exercise authority over them for their good? Was it possible that they had put more money into the enterprise than any other family had, and on the basis of their financial flotation they felt they had first claim on the honors and rewards of the Messianic kingdom?

Their love for the Master may have been just as sincere and their loyalty to the Lord and to his program may have been unwavering throughout, and yet this feeling may have been cherished at the same time, that money and social

²⁷ John 19. 27.

²⁸ Matt. 20. 20.

standing ought to be recognized in the distribution of the prizes in the end. Had not the Lord said, "Whosoever hath, to him shall be given"?²⁹ Jesus had to make it perfectly clear at this time that the only preeminence granted in his Kingdom was granted not to preeminent wealth nor social rank, but only to preeminent ministry in service and sacrifice.

Now, if this were true, that Salome and James and John had cherished a feeling of family superiority and exclusiveness, it would go far to explain that feeling of personal dislike for them which we more than half suspected the other disciples to have, and in itself it would be a sufficient reason for the indignation concerning the two brethren which moved the ten at this time, while it would furnish one possible and plausible ground for the conceiving and preferring of such a request by Salome and her sons. For some cause they seemed to think that there was a good chance at least for James and John to obtain the chief honors next to those held by Jesus himself. It may have been because they felt that they were more aristocratic than the rest, and the best things belonged to them by that right.

Another reason for this presumptuous request has been suggested. Their superior claim may have rested upon relationship. In John 19. 25 we read that among the women who were standing by the cross of Jesus were Mary his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. How many women are enumerated here? Three or four? If only three, then Mary the mother had a sister also named Mary. Two Marys in one family are not to be accepted without good reason. If four women are mentioned, then the sister of Mary the mother of Jesus is not named. When we turn to Mark 15. 40 we find a list of the women beholding the crucifixion, and

²⁹ Matt. 13. 12.

among them are named Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the less and of Joses, and Salome. If these lists are parallel, then Salome in Mark's list may take the place of the sister of Mary the mother of Jesus in the list by John.

When we remember that John mentions neither his own name nor that of James nor that of Salome anywhere in the fourth Gospel, but prefers certain phrases to represent them instead of their own names, we may be inclined to conclude that the sister of the mother of Jesus mentioned by John is his own mother Salome. If so, then Jesus and James and John were cousins; and this request for preference over the ten and all the other disciples came from his cousins and his aunt. His own brethren had refused to believe in him. Among his followers these cousins were the nearest of kin. They may have considered that a good reason for asking to sit at his right hand and at his left in the Kingdom. We are inclined to regard these two things, their family aristocracy (including their superior education and means) and their family relationship, as constituting two elements of their hope that Jesus would give them the preference over their fellows.

A third and still better reason for the hope they had within them was the fact that John clearly was the favorite among the twelve and that James shared with him the privilege of closer intimacy with the Lord. If Jesus really did like them better than the others, let him prove it by promising them now the favorites' final reward. If James and John had any natural or acquired refinement of manner which superior advantages in home or school or society had furnished them, Jesus, who had a natural affinity for all the refinements of life, would like them all the better on that account. If they were the sons of his mother's sister, his own cousins by blood relationship, he would be drawn to them all the more on that account. If Salome was like Mary, and her sons were like herself, then to that

extent heredity would have helped to make the characters of James and John congenial to that of Jesus.

Salome surely was a good woman, religious without reservation, capable of entire consecration to the cause she espoused, ready to give up to it her substance and her sons, ready to furnish it forth as far as in her lay with both money and men and to grant it ungrudgingly the devotion of her own life. She was one of those mothers who have influenced world history for good by the careful training of their children into a love for the highest and best and a corresponding hatred for the low and the mean. [Probably John owed more to her than to any other mortal before he met Jesus.] She started him right, and he went in a straight line through life. He responded to the highest truth which shone upon him as naturally as a flower might open to the sun. Like the Master he increased in wisdom as he increased in stature, and he increased in grace as gradually and as quietly and as normally as he increased in knowledge and strength.

There seems to have been no shock or crisis anywhere in his religious development. When John the Baptist began preaching at the Jordan, and it became apparent that the voice of prophecy had awakened once more in the land of Israel, John the son of Salome at once became a disciple, and tarried in the company of this master, listening eagerly to his prophecies and learning much from his spirit and ways. When John the Baptist pointed out Jesus, John the son of Salome became one of the first disciples of this new Master, passing as readily from the discipleship of the Baptist into that of Jesus as he had passed from the instructions of his mother to those of the Jordan evangelist. We read in John 3. 21, "He that doeth the truth cometh to the light." That seemed axiomatic to John. Anybody who sought for the truth would come to the light, just as soon as the light was seen, as a matter of course. That had been the way with his own life throughout.

In this respect he was the very antipode of the apostle Paul. Paul's life had been revolutionized by that Damascus vision. He had been transformed from the chief antagonist of Christianity into its chief propagandist. He had been changed from Saul the persecuting Pharisee into Paul the preacher and apostle. He was converted; and his conversion made him a new man. Old things had passed away and all things had become new with him. There are such experiences to-day and some of those who have them seem to think that they are the most desirable experiences any man can have. They are not only desirable but absolutely necessary to a man's salvation when he has once gone wrong; but surely the experience of Paul is not the only model experience for the human race. The experience of John is a better experience than that of Paul.

Paul and John were both good men, and they both did great service for the Christian Church. Suppose they sat side by side in a testimony meeting, and we asked Paul to tell us when he was converted. Paul would say: "It was on the way to Damascus. I fell upon the earth. I was blind for three days. Then the scales fell from my eyes, and I found that the world was a new world to me. Since then I have been a changed man. All my aims and aspirations are changed. For me to live is Christ and to die is gain."

Then we ask John to tell us when he was converted, and he would say: "I do not know. I cannot point to any definite time or place of my conversion as Paul can. I never had such a vision as he had there on the Damascus desert. I never had any such crisis experience in my life. My mother always taught me to do what was right and to love what was good and true, and I always tried to please her by obeying her and the precepts of the Holy Book. Then I became a disciple of John the Baptist, and he never had any such radical transformation of character as Paul has just described. He was filled with the Holy Spirit from

his mother's womb. It had been foretold that that would be true of him, and his life proved the prophecy reliable. I tried to make my life like his while I remained with him as his disciple. Then I became a follower of Jesus, and he never had any experience like this Damascus experience of Paul. The grace of God rested upon him as a child, and he advanced in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and men through all his boyhood and youth. He was full of grace and truth as a man. I tried to make my life like his as his disciple. Of his fullness I received, and grace for grace, until now for me to live is Christ and to die is gain."

Suppose we should turn again to the apostle Paul and say to him: "What do you think of that as a model Christian experience? Is it as good as your own?" Do you not suppose that the apostle Paul would say, "I am glad that the Lord Jesus came into this world to save sinners, of whom I am chief; but I would rather a thousand fold that my life throughout had been like that of the apostle John or that of John the Baptist or that of my Master and Lord. John's life made him worthy of being chosen as an apostle, but I always have felt that I was not worthy to be called by that name. If I had my life to live over again I would try my best to make it like that of Jesus or John the Forerunner or John the Beloved"?

Let people who have clear and definite conversions rejoice in them. Let equally good Christians who have no such definite transformation of character to point out in their past experiences rejoice that such a crisis has not been necessary with them. The Johannine type of religious development is a higher and better type for us to covet and to endeavor to realize in the Christian home and the Christian Church.³⁰ The Pauline type is a blessed possi-

³⁰ It is the type represented by Origen, Thomas à Kempis, Melanchthon, Bengel, Zinzendorf, and Wesley.

bility when the Johannine type has not been attained.³¹ The normal and model character will recognize the truth at its first revelation and will love the truth from the first moment of its recognition. That was the character John had. That made him the most devoted disciple of Jesus; and that made him the disciple whom Jesus loved.

He was made one of the Chosen Three, and accompanied Jesus through the years of his ministry. He was the last at the cross, and to him Jesus committed the charge of Mary the mother. He was the first of the apostles at the open tomb, and the first to have faith in the fact of the Lord's resurrection. He was in the upper room and at Pentecost and remained in Jerusalem as one of the pillars of the church for some years afterward. Later he was an exile on the island of Patmos and there the marvelous visions of the Apocalypse were granted him. These he wrote down in a book. Still later he wrote the fourth Gospel in order that men might believe that Jesus was the Christ. Later still he wrote three epistles which were cherished in the church as the last memorials of the last of the apostolic band. So much we may gather from the Scriptures themselves. To fill out this meager outline of John's later life we must look outside of the Scriptures and into the records of church tradition concerning him.

IV. JOHN IN TRADITION AND LEGEND

The traditions concerning John are of varying value. Some of them have all the marks of truthfulness and come to us upon reasonably good authority. Others have all the marks of pure invention and evidently are the product of unbridled imagination. We mention first a few of the more reliable: 1. We are told that John remained in Jerusalem until the death of Mary the mother of Jesus, about A. D. 48. Irenæus tells us that later he took up his residence in

³¹ It is the type represented by Augustine, Luther, and Calvin.

Ephesus³²; and the early church believed that he composed the fourth Gospel and the three epistles while he was living in this city. Most of the more trustworthy anecdotes concerning the apostle are related of him during his residence in Ephesus in his old age.

Between the residence in Jerusalem and the residence in Ephesus there is an interval of possibly a score of years of which we know nothing at all. Tertullian says that John came to Rome in this period and there was thrown into a cauldron of boiling oil, from which he came forth unhurt. He adds that John immediately was banished to his island exile.³³ Jerome repeats this story and declares that John came forth from this bath in boiling oil more sound and vigorous than when he was thrown in, and he bids us observe that, although John afterward died a natural death, he at this time "in spirit failed not of martyrdom, and that he drank the cup of confession which the three young men in the fiery furnace also drank, although the persecutor did not shed his blood."³⁴ With this single glimpse of the apostle's experiences in this interval we may trace his course from Jerusalem to Rome and from Rome to Ephesus and from Ephesus to Patmos and from Patmos to Ephesus again. Of these four places of residence we may quote scriptural authority for the first and the fourth. We may feel rather doubtful about the second, though it comes within the range of possibility.³⁵ We may feel reasonably assured about the third, because of the practical concurrence of all authorities among the church Fathers at this point.

³² Adv. Haer. III. 1, 1; 3, 4. So also Apollonius, Polycrates, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Tertullian, Eusebius, Jerome.

³³ De Praesc. Haer., 36.

³⁴ Commentary on Matthew 20. 23.

³⁵ Renan, L'Antechrist, XXX, and Salmon, Introduction, p. 396, think it probable that John was with Peter in Rome before Peter's martyrdom and that John escaped afterward into Asia Minor.

The city of Ephesus seems to have been peculiarly privileged in the apostolic age. Its Christian church was founded by the apostle Paul, and he labored longer in this city than in any other of the great centers of his missionary activity. To the church in Ephesus Paul wrote his most sublime epistle, the final formulation of his faith. Timothy was a bishop in Ephesus in later days; and then, last of all, the apostle John came here to live and blessed all the neighboring churches with his presence and preaching, his admonition and instruction, his Gospel and epistles, his apostolic authority and his holy life.

It was the fitting place for the last of the apostles to spend the last of his days. It was the chief vantage point for apostolic direction and supervision. Jerusalem had fallen. Rome had not yet become the center of Christendom. Asia Minor was the most vital portion of the Christian commonwealth at this period, and Ephesus was the greatest city of Asia Minor. It was here, as in a watch tower, that the aged apostle established himself. It was from this center that he went out upon his apostolic visitations, and it was from this center that he sent out his Gospel and his epistles, and it was in this center that he composed the Apocalypse and preached and lived the gospel possibilities revealed in Christ.³⁶

2. Polycarp was a disciple and friend of the apostle John, and Irenæus was a disciple and friend of Polycarp. Irenæus tells us that Polycarp said that "John, the disciple of the Lord, going to bathe at Ephesus, and perceiving Cerinthus within, rushed out of the bathhouse without bathing, exclaiming, Let us fly, lest even the bathhouse fall down, because Cerinthus, the enemy of the truth, is within."³⁷

³⁶ The modern name of Ephesus is Ayasalouk, which is a corruption of ἄγιος Θεόλογος, "the saintly divine," "the holy theologian," the name given to John and thus preserved to this day.

³⁷Adv. Haer., III. iii. 4.

We can well believe that this story is true. Cerinthus was a heretic, and it would be like John to show his reprobation of a heretic by such action as Polycarp had witnessed.

3. Another side of the apostle's character is well illustrated in a story told us by Clement of Alexandria. He declares that the story is no myth but a true tradition concerning John; and it is so characteristic of the apostle of love that we are ready to accept it on his authority. He tells us that John was invited from Ephesus into all the contiguous territories, to ordain ministers and to appoint bishops and to set in order all the affairs of the churches. Then he proceeds: "Having come to one of the cities not far off, and seeing a youth, powerful in body, comely in appearance, and ardent, he said to the bishop appointed, 'This youth I commit to you in all earnestness, in the presence of the church, and with Christ as witness.' Then he set out for Ephesus.

"The bishop taking home the youth committed to him, reared, kept, cherished, and finally baptized him. After this he relaxed his stricter care and guardianship, under the idea that the seal of the Lord he had set on him was a complete protection to him. But on his obtaining premature freedom, some youths of his age, idle, dissolute, and adepts in evil courses, corrupt him. First they entice him by many costly entertainments; then afterward by night issuing forth for highway robbery, they take him along with them. Then they dared to execute together something greater. He by degrees got accustomed; and from greatness of nature, when he had gone aside from the right path, and like a hard-mouthed and powerful horse, had taken the bit between his teeth, rushed with all the more force down into the depths; and having entirely despaired of salvation in God, he no longer meditated what was insignificant, but having perpetrated some great exploit, now that he was once lost, he made up his mind to a like fate with the rest. Taking them and forming a band of robbers, he was the

prompt captain of the bandits, the fiercest, the bloodiest, the cruellest.

"Time passed, and some necessity having emerged, they send again for John. He, when he had settled the other matters on account of which he came, said, 'Come now, O bishop, restore to us the deposit which I and the Saviour committed to thee in the face of the church, over which you preside, as witness.' The other was at first confounded, thinking that it was a false charge about money which he did not get; and he could neither believe the allegation regarding what he had not, nor disbelieve John. But when he said, 'I demand the young man, and the soul of the brother,' the old man, groaning deeply, and bursting into tears, said, 'He is dead.' 'How and what kind of death?' 'He is dead,' he said, 'to God. For he turned wicked and abandoned, and at last a robber; and now he has taken possession of the mountain in front of the church, along with a band like him.' Rending, therefore, his clothes, and striking his head with great lamentation, the apostle said: 'It was a fine guard of a brother's soul I left! But let a horse be brought me, and let some one be my guide on the way.' He rode away, just as he was, straight from the church.

"On coming to the place he is arrested by the robbers' outpost; neither fleeing nor entreating, but crying, 'It was for this I came. Lead me to your captain,' who meanwhile was waiting, all armed as he was. But when he recognized John as he advanced, he turned, ashamed, to flight. The other followed with all his might, forgetting his age, crying: 'Why, my son, dost thou flee from me, thy father, unarmed, old? Son, pity me. Fear not; thou hast still hope of life. I will give account to Christ for thee. If need be, I will willingly endure thy death, as the Lord did death for us. For thee I will surrender my life. Stand, believe, Christ hath sent me.'

"And he, when he heard, first stood, looking down; then

threw down his arms, then trembled and wept bitterly. And on the old man approaching, he embraced him, speaking for himself with lamentations as he could, and baptized a second time with tears, concealing only his right hand. The other pledging, and assuring him on oath that he would find forgiveness for himself from the Saviour, beseeching and falling on his knees, and kissing his right hand itself, as now purified by repentance, led him back to the church. Then, by supplicating with copious prayers, and striving along with him in continual fastings, did not depart, as they say, till he restored him to the church, presenting in him a great example of true repentance, and a great token of regeneration, a trophy of the resurrection for which we hope.”³⁸

How like the apostle John all of this seems!—his attraction to the promising youth and his intuitive perception of his possibilities, the unhesitating and public rebuke of the bishop, the love which defied danger and strove with the recalcitrant until his heart was melted and his will was won, and in it all that unbounded confidence in the power of his gospel to help and to save. We see no compelling reason to question the truth of this tale.

4. Jerome tells us that in his extreme old age John, no longer able to walk, was carried to the church; and there he was not able to preach a sermon but contented himself with repeating over and over, “Little children, love one another, love one another, love one another.” When the disciples wearied of these words and asked him why he said nothing more he answered that this was the Lord’s commandment, and if this were done it would be all-sufficient. *Præceptum Domini est, et, si solum fiat, sufficit.*³⁹

5. All the traditions seem to agree that John outlived all the other apostles and died in Ephesus in extreme old

³⁸ Quis Div. Salv., XLII. Ante-Nicene Fathers, vol. ii, p. 603.

³⁹ Commentary on Gal. 6. 10.

age. Jerome says that he lived sixty-eight years after the crucifixion, and that would fix his death somewhere about A. D. 100. Epiphanius says that John was ninety-four years old when he died, and Suidas says he lived to be one hundred and twenty. We know as little about the date of his death as we do about the date of his birth. We think it probable that he was the youngest of the apostles, and possibly ten years younger than Jesus.⁴⁰ We are ready to accept the tradition that he lived longest, surviving the whole band of the apostles, and that he died a very old and feeble man.

There are many other traditions concerning John, some of which may have some basis of truth, but most of which are the product of wild imaginations. We mention a few of these as samples of grotesqueness in ecclesiastical fiction: 1. John Cassian, a hermit of the fifth century and the founder of monasticism in the West, says that it had been told him that John in his old age had a tame partridge. One day he was amusing himself with it and caressing the bird by stroking its head when a young man returning from the chase found him engaged in this trivial occupation and said: "Art thou that John whose singular renown led even a man like me to desire to know thee? How, then, canst thou occupy thyself with an employment like this?" The apostle replied, "What is that in thy hand?" He answered, "A bow." Said John, "Why dost thou not always carry it bent?" He answered, "Because it would in that case lose its elasticity; and, when it was necessary to use it, it would fail me from the too continuous strain." "Just so," said the apostle. "Let not this slight and brief relaxation of mind perplex thee, since without it the spirit would flag from unremitting strain, and it would fail me when the call of duty came." It is a pretty story. It may be a true story. It comes from a rather remote source, however, and

⁴⁰ So Krenkel, *Der Apostel Johannes*, p. 129.

it has been told in substance of so many other people as well as John that we are not disposed to give it much credit.

2. In the Acts of the Holy Apostle and Evangelist John we read that John's fame spread as far as to Rome, and the emperor sent to Ephesus for him. On the journey from Ephesus to Rome John ate nothing except one date on each Lord's Day and the soldiers who brought him to the emperor declared that he was a god and no man, for he could live without eating bread. He bore his witness before Domitian, and the emperor demanded a sign that what he said was true. "Immediately John asked for a deadly poison. They brought it on the instant. John, therefore, having taken it, put it into a large cup, and filled it with water, and mixed it, and cried out with a loud voice, and said, 'In thy name, Jesus Christ, Son of God, I drink the cup which thou wilt sweeten; and the poison in it do thou mingle with thy Holy Spirit, and make it become a draught of life and salvation, for the healing of soul and body, for digestion and harmless assimilation, for faith not to be repented of, for an undeniable testimony of death as the cup of thanksgiving.'

"When he had drunk the cup, those standing beside Domitian expected that he was going to fall to the ground in convulsions. And when John stood, cheerful, and talked with them safe, Domitian was enraged against those who had given the poison, as having spared John. But they swore by the fortune and health of the king, and said that there could not be a stronger poison than this. And John, understanding what they were whispering to one another, said to the king: 'Do not take it ill, O king, but let a trial be made and thou shalt learn the power of the poison. Bring some condemned criminal from the prison.' And when he had come, John put water into the cup, and swirled it round, and gave it with all the dregs to the condemned criminal. And he, having taken it and drunk, immediately fell down and died." It is somewhat of a relief to us to

read further that John told the emperor that he did not desire to become a murderer in his august presence and taking the dead man by the hand he raised him up alive.⁴¹ This is a sample of many of the marvelous tales which gathered about the name of the great apostle.

3. One of the most amusing of John's miracles, recorded in the Apocryphal Acts of Saint John, is thus reported by Salmon in his Introduction to the New Testament:⁴² "On their journey the party stopped at an uninhabited caravan-serai. They found there but one bare couch, and having laid clothes on it they made the apostle lie on it, while the rest of the party laid themselves down to sleep on the floor. But John was troubled by a great multitude of bugs, until, after having tossed sleepless for half the night, he said to them, in the hearing of all, 'I say unto you, O ye bugs, be ye kindly considerate; leave your home for this night, and go to rest in a place which is far from the servants of God.'

"At this the disciples laughed, while the apostle turned to sleep, and they conversed gently, so as not to disturb him. In the morning the first to awake went to the door, and there they saw a great multitude of bugs standing. The rest collected to view, and at last John awoke and saw likewise. Then (mindful rather of his grateful obligation to the bugs than of the comfort of the next succeeding traveler) he said, 'O ye bugs, since ye have been kind and have observed my charge, return to your place.' No sooner had he said this and risen from the couch, than the bugs all in a run rushed from the door to the couch, climbed up the legs, and disappeared into the joinings. And John said, 'See how these creatures, having heard the voice of a man, have obeyed; but we, hearing the voice of God, neglect and disobey; and how long, how long?'"

We need not spend any time upon stories like these. We do not even care to ask whether any experience of the

⁴¹ Ante-Nicene Fathers, vol. viii, p. 561.

⁴² Salmon, Introduction to the New Testament, p. 350.

apostle ever furnished the slightest basis of fact for such a narrative.

4. In spite of the fact that a warning and correction had been appended to the fourth Gospel,⁴³ the belief maintained itself that the apostle John never had died. One tradition stated that he made provision for the care of the church after his departure and then asked some of the brethren to accompany him with baskets and spades. Coming to the grave of a certain Christian, he told them to dig; and as they did so he urged them to make the trench deep. When it was finished he threw his outer garments into it and stood and prayed: "Receive the soul of thy John. . . . And as I go to thee, let the fire withdraw, let the darkness be overcome, let the furnace be slackened, let Gehenna be extinguished, let the angels follow, let the demons be afraid, let the princes be broken in pieces, let the powers of darkness fall, let the places on the right hand stand firm, let those on the left abide not, let the devil be muzzled, let Satan be laughed to scorn, let his madness be tamed, let his wrath be broken, let his children be trodden under foot, and let all his root be uprooted; and grant to me to accomplish the journey to thee, not insulted, not despitefully treated, and to receive what thou hast promised to those who live in purity, and who have loved a holy life." Then he sent the brethren away, and when they came back on the morrow they did not find him, but his sandals were lying there, and a fountain was welling up at that place.⁴⁴

5. Another legend says that he was buried, but that he was only asleep in his grave; and Augustine tells us that it had been reported to him that the ground above the grave rose and fell with John's breathing and that the moving dust bore its continuous witness to the truth that the apostle though laid to rest was alive and breathing still.⁴⁵

⁴³ John 21. 23.

⁴⁴ Ante-Nicene Fathers, vol. viii, p. 563.

⁴⁵ Tract. in Joh., cxxiv, 2.

6. Still another legend declared that John had been translated, like Elijah, and would appear again to herald the second coming of the Lord. The Greek Church still observes the Feast of the Translation of the Body of John. Beza tells us that an impostor appeared in his day who claimed to be the apostle John returned to the earth. This claimant was sent back to heaven, like Elijah, in a chariot of fire; for he was burned at the stake in Toulouse.

We dismiss all these legends as unworthy of any serious consideration, and we turn back to the more trustworthy traditions and to the facts recorded in the New Testament to see if we can derive from a careful study of them any vital and consistent conception of the man of whom these things are told. .

V. JOHN THE SON OF THUNDER

We do not know as much of the apostle John as most people think we do. We know too little to be absolutely certain about any character analysis we may attempt to present. Of one thing, however, we may feel assured. Whatever characterization the Master may have given to John will be a reliable one. Now, the Master gave a name to James and to John which must have been suggested by some peculiarity of their nature and conduct, something which made them different from other men and worthy to bear the title he chose for them and assigned to them for their very own. The Master called them, Boanerges, Sons of Thunder! What an utterly surprising fact that is to begin with!

We thought the apostle John was gentle and sweet. We thought he was one of these loving, clinging, delicate, sensitive souls who would shrink from anything which was startling or shocking or loud. We thought there was something refined and girlish and effeminate about the apostle John; and the Master calls him Sir Thunderclap, Boaner-

ges, a Son of Thunder! The Master probably was right in giving him that name. It must have suited him and there must have been good and sufficient reasons for it or the Lord never would have chosen that name for him. It would be well for us to begin our study of John's character from this point of view. Here will be a fundamental element in his make-up.

Why was John called a son of thunder? 1. It surely was not because he had a loud voice or a boisterous manner. It was not because he roared in his talking. It was not because he was a man of thundering speech. There have been preachers whose heavy voices shook the buildings in which they spoke and whose tones rolled like thunder among the rafters, and they may have thought that they were Boanerges like James and John. There have been men who measured their personal satisfaction with their own performance in the pulpit according to the degree in which they had wrought themselves up into a storm of emotion or a whirlwind of passion, and according as they freely perspired and fairly bellowed they regarded themselves a thundering success. They were Boanerges of a sort; but they were not like James and John. Jesus was too quiet himself to be attracted by any habitual tempestuousness of manner. James and John would not have belonged to the Chosen Three if they could have been heard a quarter of a mile every time they spoke. Even Elijah had learned that an earthquake and a whirlwind and fire were not as impressive and as helpful as a still small voice. We feel sure that the title which Jesus gave did not mark some personal peculiarity of manner or speech, but, rather, called attention to some deeper characteristic of the inner spirit of the man.

2. Some have thought that James and John were given this name because they were disciples of John the Baptist, whose preaching startled the whole land like a thunderclap, whose appeals to conscience were like thunderbolts, and

whose denunciations of wrongdoing rolled like thunder clouds over the hearts of men. John the Baptist was the Elijah of the New Testament. Jesus said that James and John had the spirit of the Elijah of the Old Testament. That spirit of the old Elijah was the spirit of the new Elijah and probably James and John had learned it from him. In so far as it may have represented a spirit of intolerance, a spirit of harshness which would visit quick judgment upon the wrongdoer or would leave the sinner to the endless endurance of his fate, it did not agree with the spirit of Christ; and it needed to be rebuked by him.

There are some preachers to-day whose whole ministry is like that of John the Baptist. Their sermons always are full of thunder and lightning. They always are striking at something or somebody. They always are denouncing present conditions. They lay the ax at the root of the tree and, not content with that, they lay to with thundering blows until the tree seems to be tottering to its fall. The whole heaven gets black while they talk and the muttering of God's wrath is about all that the people hear. John the Baptist was very much disappointed when Jesus came. To his surprise the ministry of Jesus was not a ministry of vengeance and wrath. He did not wield the ax as John had thought he would. He did not burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire. He did not blast and ruin and devastate. [He healed and helped and blessed and saved and preached good tidings instead of instant and constant woe.] He could blaze with indignation when necessity required, but it was only once or twice that he thought it necessary to blaze at all. His ministry was more like that of the summer sunshine than that of the thunder cloud. Thunderstorms soon thunder themselves out. They do not keep thundering all the time. They serve their purpose and then they pass away. These men who keep thundering all the time generally have to steal somebody else's thunder to keep up the supply; and they are belated individuals anyway. They

belong to the dispensation of the Law; they have not come on into the dispensation of grace and truth. They make the mistake of thinking that to be a Boanerges one must be a John the Baptist. A Boanerges is one who can be a Boanerges upon occasion and not one who is a Boanerges all the time. A man may be a Boanerges and yet be a disciple of Christ.

Here, then, we have a key to John's character. 3. Jesus gave him this name because he had that in him which could flash fire at times. A man cannot flash fire unless he has some flint in him. It runs up and down his backbone and it shows in his face. The old prophet said, "Therefore have I set my face like a flint."⁴⁶ Not all of the people of God have faces like that. There are a few flintfaces in every age and in every community, but not many are of that caliber. John could set his face like a flint. There were volcanic depths in his nature and there were eruptions from those depths upon occasion, and sometimes they came very unexpectedly and they caught the unwary in their blistering lava floods. John was a man of intense convictions, backed by a sublime courage and faith. He was a man who made up his mind, and whose purpose thereafter was unalterably fixed. He came to a knowledge of the truth, and then he knew he was right and he was ready to risk for the truth and for the right all that he had and all that he was. He was a man who was ready to be singular and exceptional and radical, and if need be disagreeable at any time and at any place. He was a man after God's own heart. He was the disciple whom Jesus loved.

Let us see this thing as clearly as we may. John was like Jesus. Both of them, both John and Jesus, could be Boanerges upon occasion. Jesus was the beloved Son, in whom the Father was well pleased. John was the beloved

⁴⁶ Isa. 50. 7.

disciple who reclined on Jesus's breast. They are the types of saintliness to all the world. Some people seem to think that a saint of God, a man after God's own heart, will be a white-complexioned, lily-fingered sentimentalist, with dreamy eyes, and a pensively sweet and infantilely clinging disposition. Their mental image of Jesus is that of a man with a pale and bloodless countenance, framed in an aureole of golden hair which is parted in the middle and falls in flowing locks upon his shoulders and adown his back, clad in a snow-white robe, and with his hands always spread in benediction. The real Jesus was a Nazarene Jew, a Palestine carpenter, with hands made horny in toil, and with feet blistered in long travel, full of manly vigor in form and speech, as approachable as Abraham Lincoln, as gentle as John Wesley, and at the same time as lionlike and bold as Martin Luther, and as true to conscience and to principle as John Knox; and just as full of courage and conviction and immovable purpose of will and therefore just as disagreeable to many of his contemporaries as were Lincoln and Luther, Wesley and Knox. There was nothing of softness or effeminacy or flabbiness about our Christ, and none of these things ought to be in any Christian saint. Ideal sainthood has nothing to do with any of them.

How do most people picture to themselves the apostle John? With the face of a sentimental young girl, with dreamy, wistful, immature features, melting blue eyes, and blonde curls falling in free abandon about his ears. We get that face from the artists who seem to think that John furnished the feminine quality in the company of the twelve. John did not have the face of a girl; he had a face set like a flint. John's hair was neither brown nor blonde nor bleached. On the contrary, in all probability it was as black as a coal. His eyes too were black; and they could flash fire from their somber depths. John was a Boanerges. He was no weakling; he was a warrior. He was no sentimentalist; he had too much sense. He was a

man of temper as well as tenderness. He was a man of nerve and of backbone, a man of stamina and of strength. Jesus liked him because he was a man, and a manly man.

It is all right for a woman to be a woman, and she can be just as womanly as she please and we will like her all the better for it. That is her business; but no man has any business to enter into competition with her in that field. John never thought of doing it. It is a great injustice to him, for which the artists have become responsible, that John should be doomed to be pictured so continuously as a sweet young girl. Frederick Denison Maurice and Charles Kingsley were looking at Leonardo da Vinci's painting of "The Last Supper," and Maurice complained that even that great master had given John too sentimental and girlish a face. Kingsley asked, "Why not?" Maurice replied: "Was not John the apostle of love? Then in such a world of misery and hate as this world is do you not think he would have more furrows in his cheek than all the other apostles?" He *had* more furrows in his cheek, more vigor in his voice, greater depths of feeling and sympathy within him, and greater possibilities of hate because greater possibilities of love. John was a Boanerges because he was a man of moral strength, a man of sublime courage, a man of intense convictions, a man capable of holy heroism. Jesus loved him for that.

His brother James must have shared this quality with him, since he shared the title given by the Lord. We know less about James than we do about John, but we know that he was the first of the twelve apostles to be martyred,⁴⁷ and we know that that martyrdom pleased the Jews. Why was that? Was it because his courage and his boldness had made him particularly conspicuous at this time and therefore particularly obnoxious to all the enemies of the Christian faith? Were they glad to have him put

⁴⁷ Acts 12. 2.

out of the way first of all, because he seemed to them to be the worst of all? Then it is one of the strange and inscrutable providences of God which permitted the one brother to be taken as the first victim of persecution among the apostles and then allowed all the other apostles to follow him on that glorious roll of the martyrs, while the other brother, who was just as much of a Boanerges as he, should survive him and all the rest and at last die a natural and peaceful death.

James and John were alike in their holy boldness and high resolution. Take that request for the chief places in the kingdom. We saw in it an exhibition of selfishness, but there is an element of heroism in it as well. The Lord had just been telling them about his coming condemnation, suffering, and death. They may not have understood it all, but they could not have misunderstood it all. They knew that there was a cup for him to drink, and, whatever it might be, they were resolved to drink it with him. When he put that test question to them they did not flinch. Without a moment's hesitation they told him that they had made up their minds on that matter and they were ready to suffer anything with him.

There may have been immense egotism in it, but there was immense loyalty as well. There may have been selfish ambition in it, but there was sublime faith as well. They did not know what the Lord's Passion would be, but, whatever it was, they were sure that there was a glory beyond it, and it was in that glory they desired to have a share. Whatever of portent there might be in the present and whatever of disaster might loom in the immediate future, they had faith to believe in the ultimate triumph of his cause. As one writer has said, "It is like the buying of land at full price in Rome when the city was in the power of an enemy."⁴⁸ It takes faith to do that, and faith of a

⁴⁸ Culross, John, Whom Jesus Loved, p. 21.

heroic quality. It was the faith of a Boanerges—ardent, vehement, uncalculating, and sublime. James and John did not need to take counsel with their brethren at that point. They were able and willing to stand alone. They had come to positive convictions and they were ready to risk all in their behalf.

A Boanerges is a man with positive convictions, a man of courage, constancy, and firmness, a man who will be true to his convictions without failing and without flinching. He will call things by their right names and he never will compromise on any harmless euphemisms. To him compromise always will seem to be born of cowardice. The practical politician always is studying expediency. The Boanerges studies only to know the right and to hit the wrong as hard as he can with his tongue and his pen and his fists. He never winks at sin, but faces it boldly and strikes it everlasting full in the front with his hardest and straightest blows. He would rather be right than be comfortable. He would rather stand alone than go with the multitude to do evil. He desires to be righteous without respect to any other consideration. He is willing to be singular and odd and unlike the great majority of his fellows, but he is not willing to be mildly inoffensive in the face of any wrong. He will make things unpleasant for wrongdoers by what he says and by what he does, and they are likely to call him idealistic and unpractical, and they are apt to decide that he is an undesirable citizen. If he would only compromise a little they could get along with him, but there is no compromise in him, and that makes him simply impossible.

Jesus loved John because he was a Boanerges. John was not very popular with other people because he was a Boanerges. Sometimes a man who is reprobated by the world is a man after God's own heart. Sometimes the man who is crucified by the world is God's beloved Son. Sometimes it happens that the man who is not the most

pleasant associate here upon the earth is the man whom Jesus most loves. A Boanerges is more than likely to disturb the peace. He is an admirable figure when he belongs to another generation, but he is not so comfortable when he is close at hand. Those who do not like to have present conditions disturbed do not care to have a Boanerges around. He is apt to say things which are disconcerting. He is sure to call a spade a spade. He may give some very bad names to people who would like to think that they are at least halfway respectable. A man like John the apostle has no patience with halfway respectability.

[He is absolutely intolerant of evil in every form and in every degree. He has such a love for the truth that he fairly hates a lie. He is incapable of any compromise with falsehood or any truce with sin.] There was no looseness nor laxity nor false liberality with him. John Duncan once said: "We are not intolerant enough. Our very calling is to be intolerant, intolerant of proved error and known sin. A man must, however, have a clear eye and a large heart before he has a right to be intolerant, either toward concrete error or concrete sin."

John the apostle was such a man. He had the clear eye and the large heart. He had intense convictions and he was capable of the most intense moral indignation. / A contemplative man, he brooded, and then he blazed; he thought, and then he thundered. / He was not talking all the time, but when he did speak his words often came like a clap of thunder from a clear sky. See how that is apparent in his writings. He hurls truth at us abruptly, like a thunderbolt. We open the fourth Gospel and the first sentence reads, "In the beginning was the Logos, and the Logos was with God, and the Logos was God." Chrysostom says, "Hear how he thunders!" Augustine says, "John has opened his words, as it were, with a burst of thunder!" Bengel says, "This is the thunder brought down to us by a son of thunder!" Frequently there is something of the

suddenness and the unexpectedness of a thunderclap in the style of John.

He is a son of thunder again in his denunciations of all sinners and sin. He has no excuses to make for wrongdoing. He does not equivocate in his terms describing it. Nowhere else in the New Testament, not even in the words of Jesus himself, do we find more irreconcilable antagonism to evil. To him Judas is a devil and the son of perdition.⁴⁹ The Jews are the children of the devil.⁵⁰ Every professing Christian who walks in the darkness is a liar, and he makes God a liar.⁵¹ The antichrist is a liar.⁵² Every sinner is a child of the devil.⁵³ Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer.⁵⁴ False teachers are to have no lodging in their homes and no greeting in their streets.⁵⁵ This is the spirit of a Boanerges—vehement, irreconcilable, uncompromising, intense in conviction and intense in denunciation, a face like flint, a backbone inflexible, straightforward in dealing, handling all subjects and all people without gloves, calling things by their right names, demanding continuous righteousness of life, and fearlessly faithful to the truth as he saw it from the beginning to the end of his days. “It is not surprising,” says Dean Stanley, “that the deep stillness of such a character should, like the Oriental sky, break out from time to time into tempests of impassioned vehemence; still less that the character which was to excel all others in its devoted love of good should give indications—in its earlier stages even in excess—of that intense hatred of evil without which love of good can hardly be said to exist.”⁵⁶

Were the Samaritans unfriendly to the Master he loved? Then let fire from heaven fall upon their inhospitable

⁴⁹ John 6. 70; 17. 12.

⁵³ 1 John 3. 8, 10.

⁵⁰ John 8. 44.

⁵⁴ 1 John 3. 15.

⁵¹ 1 John 1. 6, 10.

⁵⁵ 2 John 10. 11.

⁵² 1 John 2. 22.

⁵⁶ Stanley, *Sermons and Essays on the Apostolic Age*, p. 250.

homes and consume them.⁵⁷ Did any man use the name of Jesus and refuse to follow him? Then let an injunction be served upon him and let him be put out of business at once.⁵⁸ That was the spirit of a Boanerges manifest in John's early life. It was a little too intolerant then, and it needed to be corrected by Christ; but John never lost the Boanerges spirit, and Jesus never desired that he should. He was the boldest of the twelve at the time of the crucifixion. He was the first to recover from the panic of the Gethsemane garden. He was the one man among all of the followers of Jesus who seems to have been near him at the trial in the high priest's palace and nearest him during the last hours on the cross. He was the first of them at the empty tomb on the morning of the Easter day, and he was the first to attain to the resurrection faith.

Did the enemies of the cross gather themselves together against the Lord and his Anointed and seem ready to celebrate their triumph over the Christian Church? Then let a book be written, an Apocalypse, full of thunders and lightnings, full of war and famine and pestilence and plague, full of the denunciation of sin and a sublime faith in the ultimate victory of the Lamb, a book to be like a bugle call to high endeavor to all the future generations of the church, a book to be a perfect tonic of inspiration to every sturdily striving saint, a book to be a *Boanerges in print!* John was the man of all men to write such a book.

Was Cerinthus, the enemy of the truth, in the bathhouse at Ephesus? Then John will not bathe there; the water will be polluted by the heretic's presence, and the house ought to fall down on his head. Had the bishop there at Smyrna allowed the neophyte committed to his charge to backslide and become the leader of the mountain banditti? Then let him be denounced publicly, and humiliated before all the people. "It was a fine guard of a brother's soul I

⁵⁷ Luke 9. 54.

⁵⁸ Luke 9. 49.

left!" A Boanerges spake in that tone of cutting irony. The spirit of a Boanerges did not die out in the old age of John. We find it in the fourth Gospel and in the epistles, those writings of the apostle's last days.

Can we summarize what we have been saying in a few short sentences? 1. John was not a Boanerges because of his loud voice. 2. He was not a Boanerges because he was a disciple of John the Baptist. 3. He was a Boanerges because of his own character. 4. Those qualities of character which gave him this title may be suggested by his intensity of conviction, his singleness of soul-devotion, his loyalty of love, his hatred of sin, manifest in his action and in his speech and in his writings as well. These things made John a Boanerges. Jesus loved John because he was a Boanerges. That disciple whom Jesus loved most of all had in him these qualities of a Boanerges.

VI. JOHN THE SAINT AND SEER

How about all of this? We thought John was a saint. We thought he was a holy man. We had thought that he was rather maidenish in disposition, of the feminine if not the effeminate type. We begin to see that that must be a mistaken conception, and that the facts are far from warranting it. John must have been a man, and a man of the heroic type, but he was a saint; and saintliness is inconsistent with a ruffled temper and with vehement language. A saint never must get angry and say and do violent things. Is that true? Perhaps we are mistaken in that conception too. What does Paul mean by giving us the command, "Be ye angry"?⁵⁹ We thought that we were to be meek and lowly in spirit like our Lord. We thought that if we were saints, or anything like what we ought to be, we would be long-suffering and forbearing in love like the Master.

Can we imagine Jesus being angry with anyone? Did

⁵⁹ Eph. 4. 26,

he ever thunder out in angry tones his denunciation of sinners and their sins? Yes, he did. In one place we are told in so many words that he "looked round about on them with anger."⁶⁰ In other passages we read that his anger expressed itself in his tones.⁶¹ He used the same tones Judas used when he became angry with Mary for wasting so much good ointment, representing so much good money thrown away. The verb in the Greek is the same, applied to Jesus and applied to Judas. Then, how about the scourge of small thongs with which he drove out of the temple the sellers of merchandise, and how about the overturning of the tables of the money-changers? That must have been quite a scene. That must have been far from being a quiet scene. There must have been violence and commotion, loud remonstrance and threatening of hand and tongue. Such things cannot be done gently. There was the rushing together of the multitude. There was clamor and confusion. With flashing eye and ringing tones Jesus mastered the mob and carried everything by storm. Their traffic was duly licensed by the authorities, but Jesus undertook to prohibit it at that time and place.⁶² John saw it all and rejoiced in it. All the Boanerges spirit in him was stirred, and he said, "This is the Master for me."

Then how about that denunciation of the scribes and the Pharisees as fools and hypocrites and blind? "Ye serpents, ye offspring of vipers, how shall ye escape the judgment of hell?"⁶³ In all literature, sacred and profane, you cannot find words which cut and hiss and burn like the words of that invective. John heard them, and all the Boanerges spirit in him was stirred by them; and he said again at the close of Christ's ministry as he had at the beginning, "This is the Master for me." Jesus was the Sinless One. Jesus was perfectly holy in conduct and speech. Yet in his life there were occasions for such outbursts of indigna-

⁶⁰ Mark 3. 5.

⁶² John 2. 13-22.

⁶¹ Matt. 9. 30; Mark 1. 43.

⁶³ Matt. 23. 13-33.

tion and anger as these. If need be, we must change our conception of saintliness to make it consistent with such experiences and with such scenes.

That gentle Jesus of the lily white hands and the seamless and spotless white robe and with the aureole always encircling his head is not to be found anywhere in our Gospels. He is a pure invention of the artists and the sentimentalists. The real Jesus was a man whose eyes could flash with indignation and whose tones could tremble with wrath upon occasion; and any man who is Christlike will be capable of these things. If gross injustice does not arouse deliberate anger within him, he has not the spirit of the Christ.

Anger is a duty sometimes. "Anger at what is wrong, at men who are false, ungodly, cruel, is Godlike, for his wrath comes on the children of disobedience; and Christlike, for he looked upon hardhearted hypocrites with anger; and a character incapable of such feeling would not be the Christian ideal."⁶⁴ It is all right to be angry on certain occasions. The apostle Paul commands us, "Be ye angry!" and he said upon another occasion, "Have this mind in you, which was also in Christ Jesus,"⁶⁵ and there is no inherent inconsistency in the two exhortations. He who has the mind of Christ will be angry sometimes. The saintliness incapable of most intense indignation and righteous anger has degenerated into softness and flabbiness. Resentment under just provocation, sudden anger in the face of gross injustice, is natural and inevitable in any strong character; and it is sanctioned in our New Testament and it is right in itself. Any good man does well to be angry when he sees the innocent suffer and any outrageous triumph of evil.

Of course there is much to be said on the other side. There is an anger which is sinful and Satanic. We are not talking about that now. We are talking about anger

⁶⁴ Candlish, Commentary on Ephesians, p. 101.

⁶⁵ Eph. 4. 26; Phil. 2. 5.

which is godlike, the anger of our Lord and Master, the anger of the Boanerges whom Jesus loved. We are concerned to show that it is wholly consistent with a saintly, holy life. Godlike anger has its root in love. God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son for the very sinners against whom his wrath had been displayed. Jesus looked around upon that synagogue company with anger, being grieved at the hardening of their hearts. He pitied them and loved them, even while he was angry with them for their stubborn hypocrisy. The anger of the Father and of the Son served the purposes of their love. It will last only until that end is reached.

Chrysostom said: "We have anger given us, not that we may commit violence upon our neighbors, but that we may correct those who are in sin. . . . Anger is implanted in us as a sort of sting, to make us gnash with our teeth against the devil, to make us vehement against him."⁶⁶ Righteous anger is anger against sin. It springs from love, and it aims at others' good. A man may be a Boanerges and call his neighbors the children of the devil and fools and hypocrites and snakes and the offspring of snakes, and still be a saint. We know that is true because Jesus did just those things. John was like Jesus. He was a Boanerges, intolerant of sin and denouncing sinners in thunder tones when occasion required; and we cannot impugn his sainthood upon these grounds. So we put down these two characteristics of the apostle John side by side, paradoxical though they may seem to some people. John was a Boanerges, and John was a saint.

1. He was the holiest man among the twelve apostles. He had a passion for purity. He was called in the early church Ὁ Παρθένος, "the Virgin," for the tradition was that he never had married and that his personal purity from his

⁶⁶ Homilies on Ephesians, II. Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, vol. xiii, p. 58.

youth up had attracted the greater love of Jesus to him. Polycrates, who was Bishop of Ephesus in the latter part of the second century, wrote to Victor at Rome that John was a priest of priestly descent and that in his old age in Ephesus he wore a golden plate fastened on his forehead which bore the inscription, "Holiness unto the Lord." If that is a legend, it is a legend true to life. The aged apostle walked before the Lord in the beauty of holiness, and holiness had written its seal on his brow, his body, his spirit, his whole personality.

2. There was one characteristic of sainthood which John seems to have possessed in full measure—the spirit of self-effacement as far as that might be allowable or possible. He seems to have been utterly void of the modern spirit of self-advertising. He never willingly thrust himself to the front. He was content always with a secondary or subordinate position. Somebody else might stand in the limelight; John preferred to stand in the shade. When the time came for him to be active he was ready to assume responsibility; but as long as anyone else was present to take the initiative John was content to allow him to lead.

This is apparent throughout the record of the Gospels, where John always is mentioned in connection with others who are more prominent than he. Only once in the four Gospels is he mentioned alone. It is apparent in his own writings, where his extreme reticence becomes characteristic throughout. His mother and his brother never are mentioned by name, and he hides himself behind a descriptive phrase. It is apparent again in the history of the early church. We read there that parties were formed, some declaring that they were of Paul, and some of Apollos, and some of Cephas, and some of Christ; but we never hear of any party in that beginning history of the church declaring itself to be of John. He was a naturally modest man, of a retiring disposition. It was only when all the other apostles had died that he came to his primacy in the church.

Even then he bore himself with simple dignity and was unassuming in conduct and speech.

An admirer of Dr. Döllinger wrote of him: "It may be doubted whether there ever was a man who in a greater degree combined such amazing powers with such beautiful simplicity. He had received almost every honor which the state or the university could bestow upon him; he was the friend of princes and the confidant of statesmen; he was possessed of information which would have made a score of men intellectually rich: and throughout it all he had the simplicity of a child."⁶⁷ We may well believe that this description would apply to the old age of John. He was honored above all other living men in the Christian Church, but he was unaffected, unassuming, simple and unselfish as a little child. Of such is the kingdom of heaven. Such the saints always have been.

John was the very opposite of the man who is forever talking about himself, vaunting his own deeds, and blowing his own trumpet. Some men put in so much time doing that that there is no time left for making their promises good. They are first-class in advertising but third-rate in performance. John omitted all advertising. He had neither time nor inclination for boasting. He was meek and lowly in spirit like his Lord. He was content to be the least among his brethren on earth, and he became the greatest in the Master's love and the church's reverence and regard. The Master realized his worth in the beginning, but it took the church a generation or two to come to the consciousness of it. He humbled himself so persistently and so effectually that the church was prone to appraise him at his own modest rating. It awoke at last to the fact that Jesus had known better than other men the incomparable exaltation of this apostle's spiritual perception and the kinship of his character with the Divine.

⁶⁷ Dr. Plummer, Expositor, Fourth Series, vol. i, p. 214.

Is this reticence and modesty inconsistent with the spirit of a Boanerges? No, it is just the thing which makes the Boanerges outburst most terrible. It is the quiet man, who has thought much before he speaks, whose words are most impressive when at last his silence is broken. It is the self-restrained but ardent nature which is capable of rising at times into the majesty and strength of a tidal wave. A Boanerges is not a bull of Bashan, bellowing all the time. A Boanerges is more like a Mount Ætna, which lies for long periods in perfect peace, but is capable at intervals of an eruption with elemental force.

Is this modesty and reticence of John's character inconsistent with the request made by James and himself for the chief places in the kingdom? No, for that request evidently was made with the knowledge that they must prove themselves worthy of the coveted honor by meeting all the conditions of its bestowment; and James and John were ready to meet those conditions, no matter what self-sacrifice and self-abasement they might entail. The ten were moved with indignation concerning the two brethren who had seemed to be selfishly ambitious and desirous of gaining a secret advantage in a promise of preference over the rest. They were inclined to think that James and John were disposed to regard themselves as aristocrats anyway; and, naturally enough, they resented any effort on their part to insure their preeminence in the glories which lay before.

Then Jesus called the ten to him and explained that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them, but he had given James and John to understand that it was not to be so with Christians. If they desired to be great among their brethren, they must prove themselves of the greatest service to their brethren. If they desired to be first among the apostles, they must minister to all the rest and be the servants of all. This was the condition of preeminence in the

Christian Church, an utter self-abnegation unto any extent of sacrifice and service. He had offered them this cup to drink; and they had been willing to drain it to the bitter dregs. Anyone who desired might drink of this cup, and it ought to arouse admiration and not indignation, love and not jealousy or hate in all who would be benefited by such uttermost consecration to the general good. With that explanation the ten were satisfied. Their indignation cooled before the challenge of James and John and Jesus to the exhibition of like humility in service and sacrifice and suffering.

With this understanding on the part of James and John of the program of Christianity and the part they must play to achieve any greatness in the kingdom their request becomes a proof of their ardent desire to be as unselfish as Jesus himself had been. Jesus made it so plain that they could not misunderstand, and they did not withdraw their request. They said: "We are able to meet this condition, to drink this cup; and if this is the way to greatness, O Lord, we are your men. With your blessing we will go this way, to the cross and to the throne."

It was the character of Jesus himself which had captivated John. It was in *his* Kingdom that he hoped to rank high. He would be like Jesus, and so worthy to sit with him on his throne. His throne mate must be a mate of his spirit as well. John knew that, and to *be* that was the chief desire of his heart.

3. John was a man with a large bump of reverence. Strong personalities had an attraction for him. Irresistibly he was drawn to them, and unhesitatingly he gave them his reverence and his love. Professor William Milligan has said, "Perhaps the most marked characteristic of the apostle John was his receptivity of disposition, his openness of heart for all that was true and beautiful and holy, and the delight with which he dwelt upon it in the inmost depths of his own soul, till it penetrated and formed his

whole nature to a likeness with itself."⁶⁸ When John the Baptist began to preach, John the fisherman forsook his nets and his home and went down to the Jordan to hear him. He was soon convinced that the Baptist was a great personality, the reviver of the ancient spirit of prophecy and the forerunner of the better things to come. He became his loyal disciple; for the Baptist was a genius and the greatest man the fisher lad ever had seen or known. When he had passed from the discipleship of John to the discipleship of Jesus, in the apostolic company he was attracted most by Peter. Peter was the strongest character aside from his own to be found among the twelve. John attached himself to him, and they became inseparable companions in the itinerant ministry of the following years.

Disciple of John the Baptist and friend of Peter, John became the devoted lover of the Lord as soon as Jesus had appeared within his horizon. Even as Jesus excelled John the Baptist and Peter and all other men, John's love for Jesus excelled all other love. He had been the loyal disciple of John the Baptist, he always was the faithful friend of Peter; but all the fervent affection of his young heart was poured out at the feet of Jesus, and all the ardor of a Boanerges was concentrated in the devotion of his life to him. John reverenced Jesus as no one of the other apostles did. John loved Jesus as he had loved no other soul on earth. He became that disciple whom Jesus loved.

4. To John himself this seemed to be his chief distinction; he had loved Jesus and Jesus had loved him. In the fourth Gospel he calls himself by that title, "The disciple whom Jesus loved."⁶⁹ It does not appear in any of our Gospels that anyone else ever called John by this name. He assumes it, because he deserved it. It belonged to him by right of conquest. He had achieved the place nearest the heart of the Incarnate One. That was the greatest

⁶⁸ Expositor, Third Series, vol. x, p. 337.

⁶⁹ John 20. 2; 21. 7, 20.

honor he ever had had or ever could have. [Abraham had been called the friend of God.] David was said to be a man after God's own heart. [Daniel was recorded in the Scripture as the one loved of God. Now John had been admitted into this glorious fellowship. Jesus had shown by his manner and preference that John was a man after his own heart. John had been the friend of Jesus, and loved of Jesus, and that had been the unparalleled privilege of his life. Jesus had called John a Boanerges, and that title belonged to him by right; but to John this was a better title, and it belonged to him by right; and so he wrote himself down for all time to come as the one who had enjoyed the distinction of being "the disciple whom Jesus loved."]

Was that inconsistent with his modesty? Of course not; it was the simple statement of the truth of the case. Modesty never is inconsistent with truthfulness. In all humility and in all gratitude John could modestly, truthfully say, "He loved me, and he loved me most." It was not a thing to boast about. If John ever had fallen to boasting of his intimate relations with Jesus, he would have forfeited all right to those relations at once. Love vaunteth not itself, and that is one reason why it is beloved. A braggart never could have been a bosom companion with Jesus. However, that closest companionship with Jesus was a thing to be cherished in memory and humbly and gratefully to be acknowledged as a man's highest honor and God's greatest gift. //

John was the disciple whom Jesus loved because he was a Boanerges, and because he was a saint, and because he was modest and meek, and because he had an inherent reverence for genius and for goodness. Jesus loved John for all these elements in his character, but the chief reason for his love was that John loved him with a love surpassing that of women. Love begets love. That disciple whom Jesus loved loved Jesus more than any other disciple did. He had a personal affection for the man Jesus. There

was a bond of personal affinity between these two. Alexander the Great had two friends. Plutarch called one of them Philo-Basileus, the friend of the king; and he called the other one Philo-Alexandros, the friend of Alexander. There was a difference between friendship for the *monarch* and friendship for the *man*. So Grotius calls Peter Philo-Christos, the friend of Christ, and John Philo-Jesus, the friend of Jesus. We doubt whether it is quite fair to Peter to make such a distinction; but there can be no question that the title given to John rightfully belongs to him.

To the outside multitude Peter may have been the best-known of the apostles and they may have looked upon Peter as the official representative of the Christ, the friend of the Messias who could answer for him when occasion required, as in the collection of the temple tax;⁷⁰ but in the inner circle everybody knew that John was the closest and dearest friend of Jesus. He shared his innermost thought. He knew his purposes and plans. He was more nearly one in spirit with Jesus than any other member of their band. Peter always was saying: "What shall I do? Shall I build three tabernacles here, O Lord? Shall I smite off Malchus's ear?" John always was thinking, "What does Jesus say? What will Jesus do?" His eye always is on Jesus. In the fourth Gospel John himself never is visible and Jesus never is invisible. Through the whole book John's object seems to be to conceal himself as far as possible and to reveal Jesus as fully as possible. To him Jesus is the fairest among ten thousand and the one altogether lovely; and he would have all men believe in him even as he himself does.

Jesus had no wife. He loved no woman more than his mother in the Nazareth home. Outside that home John came nearest his heart. The wealth of his affection was given to John, and John proved himself worthy of it by

⁷⁰ Matt. 17. 24, 25.

returning it in full measure. It was the greatest distinction ever given to a man.

5. John was a seer. In the primary sense of the term it was true of him. It may have been because he was the youngest in the apostolic company that he seems to have been able to see better and to see more than the others did. He calls himself "He that hath seen."⁷¹ He seems to have been the only one who saw the water and the blood flowing from the Saviour's side. When Peter and John went running together to the empty tomb to see what had become of Jesus, John the younger outran Peter and came first to the tomb and stooped and looked in and saw all that was needed to satisfy him in this matter. Peter came panting behind him and never thought of stooping at the entrance as John had. His eyes would not serve him there in that early morning dawn. He entered the tomb where he could give to these things the closer inspection his older eyes made necessary to him.⁷² When the seven were out upon the sea fishing and a Stranger appeared on the shore and told them where to find fish, John strained his eyes through the sea fog until the intuition within him had ripened into a certainty and he turned to Peter and said, "It is the Lord."⁷³ His heart had been the first to surmise it. His eye had been the first to assure it. Here are the tokens of the seer in the primary sense.

John saw with his heart and with his intuitions as well as with his eyes. He saw deeper into the being and personality of Jesus than anyone else. The fourth Gospel is the proof of that statement. He saw farther into the future than any other disciple, and discerned the whole course of the contest and glimpsed the triumph of the end. The Apocalypse is the proof of this. He realized as no one else the deeper principles of the new revelation. He

⁷¹ John 19. 35.

⁷² John 20. 4-6.

⁷³ John 21. 7.

saw more clearly than the rest how divine was the daily life of Jesus. He was a mystic in the best sense of that term. He does not have much interest in the outside of things. He always is endeavoring to see to their center and to take hold of them from within. His keen eye pierces to the very heart of things and he looks beyond the clouds to where the clear sun is shining.

In the ancient church the flying eagle was his symbol. The eagle symbolized inspiration, aspiration, exaltation, heavenly-mindedness, and holiness. The eagle lives in the heights, rises on tireless wings into the ether, soars above the clouds, flies to the sun and with open eye endures to take his glories in. So the Eagle-Evangelist rises to loftier spiritual heights than any other writer in our New Testament. His thought moves in the heavenly places. His affections are set on things above, not on things on the earth. On tireless wings his ardor rises into the very presence-chamber of the King.

See how the fourth Gospel begins; and compare its opening words with those of the synoptics. Augustine said: "Those three evangelists occupy themselves chiefly with the things which Christ did in the flesh, and with the precepts which he delivered to men, who also bear the burden of the flesh, for their instruction in the rightful exercise of this mortal life. Whereas John, on the other hand, soars like an eagle above the clouds of human infirmity, and gazes upon the light of the unchangeable truth with those keenest and steadiest eyes of the heart."⁷⁴ Adam of Saint Victor, the greatest poet of the Latin tongue in the Middle Ages, after characterizing the other evangelists says,

Sed Johannes, ala bina
Charitatis, aquilina
Forma, fertur in divina
Puriori lumine.

⁷⁴ Harmony of the Gospels, I, 6. Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, vol. vi, p. 81.

John, the eagle's feature having,
Earth on love's twain pinions leaving,
Soars aloft, God's truth perceiving
In light's purer atmosphere.⁷⁶

John is indeed "the eagle that flies high, so right high and yet more high than does any other bird, because he is feathered with fine love, and beholds above other the beauty of the Sun, and the beams and brightness of the Sun."⁷⁷

6. This leads us to say next that John is the greatest theologian and the most profound philosopher of the early Christian Church. The church Fathers rightly called him, 'Ο Θεολόγος, The Theologian. Even Baur agrees with this verdict. He says, speaking of the Johannine type of thought, "*In ihm erreicht die neutestamentliche Theologie ihre höchste Stufe und ihre vollendetste Form*"—"In it the New Testament theology reaches its highest plane and its most perfect form." A more recent authority concludes, "In the writings ascribed to John there is more of a complete and reasoned theology than is to be found in any of the other New Testament writers."⁷⁷ Love gives insight. Supreme love gives supreme insight. Ernesti called the fourth Gospel the "heart of Christ." John does get at the heart of things as no other apostle does. He had constant access to the very heart of Jesus, and he gives constant expression to the very heart of the truth. When we read his books we say to ourselves: "The final word has now been spoken. The ultimate reach of revelation is here. There is nothing more to be said."

The Johannine theology is reasonable and reasoned, but the processes of its reasoning seldom are in evidence. It is of the contemplative, intuitive, and mystical type. It sees life as a whole. It presents truth as a categorical im-

⁷⁶ The poem and translation may be found in Schaff's History of the Christian Church, vol. i, p. 588.

⁷⁷ The Mirror of Simple Souls.

⁷⁷ T. B. Strong, Hastings's Dictionary of the Bible, II, 683.

perative. It is not built up slowly and by degrees. As recorded, it is finished and complete. Simplicity and unity are its two characteristics. There is nothing vague or abstract about it; it is altogether clear and concrete. The spiritual and the practical are at one with John. He looks at everything from the standpoint of the eternal life and light and love, but he sees these at home in the human heart and incarnate in human history. [The riddle of the universe is no riddle to him. He has the key which will unlock all its mysteries.] He has discovered the underlying principles which will explain the unity of time and eternity. He knows the Source of all things, the Reason of all things, and the Goal of all things. The philosophy and the metaphysics of the ages never have plumbed deeper depths or climbed any higher heights than have been reached by this humble and loving disciple of the Incarnate One. All future investigation and research bids fair to come back to the conclusions set forth in uttermost simplicity in these writings of John.

7. John was the last in the apostolic company to come to a commanding position in the church. Some have regarded this fact as a prophecy of future church history. James Stalker has voiced this opinion as follows: "Peter first stamped himself on the church, then Paul, last John. And, as it was in that first period of Christianity, so was it to be in the subsequent ages. For fourteen centuries Peter ruled Christendom, as was symbolized by the church inscribed with his name in the city which was, for most of that period, the center of the Christian world; then, at the Reformation, Paul's influence took the place of Peter's, Paul's doctrine being the soul of Protestantism. The turn of John has still to come: his spirit will dominate the millennial age. Perhaps in the individual Christian three such stages may also be distinguished—the period of zeal to begin with, when we resemble Peter; the period of steady work and reasoned conviction, when we follow in

the steps of Paul; the period of tolerance and love, when we are acquiring the spirit of John."⁷⁸ Faith is all-important in Paul's theology, hope is the keynote of Peter's preaching and of Peter's epistle, love is characteristic of John. "Now abideth faith, hope, love, these three; and the greatest of these is love." "Love therefore is the fulfillment of the law." It was Paul who said these things, and that very fact suggests that such a partition of graces among the apostolic leaders is not altogether warranted by the record concerning them, and we must not, therefore, push it too far.

Professor H. C. Sheldon, with his usual caution, puts in a partial disclaimer at this point. He says, "These different standpoints, the Petrine, the Pauline, the Johannine, distinguished as respects relative emphasis upon different truths, give the appearance of successive doctrinal developments within the apostolic age. Some have imagined that these developments have been destined to a repetition upon a wider scale. The Petrine standpoint, it is claimed, affiliates with the Roman Catholic theology, the Pauline with the Protestant, while the Johannine represents the reconciliation and higher union of the two. As the church has passed through a Petrine and a Pauline stage, it has arrived now at the border of a Johannine era."

"This view, pushed to the extreme, is artificial and fanciful. There is no such broad contrast between Petrinism and Paulinism as exists between Romanism and Protestantism. No definite line of demarkation can be drawn between the teaching of Paul and of John. The two types are not exclusive of each other. They were not so in the mind of Paul himself. His thought often ran into the domain of John, as in that sublimest hymn to the praise of love in the First Epistle to the Corinthians, and also in his many references to an interior life-union with Christ.

⁷⁸ The Two St. Johns, p. 21.

The church in its most advanced stage will not put aside Peter or Paul in favor of John, but acknowledge the truth taught by each. Nevertheless, a degree of truth pertains to the theory. We have actually entered upon an age which lays more stress upon the Johannine theology than any age which has preceded.”⁷⁹ The reason for that is that we are desirous of getting back to Christ, and we find that John can help us more than any other man. “The most Christlike of the apostles has left this legacy to the church —that without him it could not have adequately known its Lord.”⁸⁰ He had powers of mind and powers of heart which made him the most profound thinker and the greatest theologian of the early church. He had those qualities in him which Jesus loved and which it might be well for us to note and emulate.

Shall we try to summarize them now? John was a Bonanerges, a man of intense convictions and ardent affections, and absolutely fearless in the expression of these in action and speech. He was no mollycoddle; he was a militant saint. He had a real reverence for genius and a fervent love for holiness. He had a natural delicacy and refinement of manner. He was of a modest and retiring disposition. He was as simple as a child in his character. You could look through him and find no obstruction to clear vision. His eye was clear, his heart was pure, his soul was single. He had an oceanlike depth of nature which could apprehend the sublimest vision and the profoundest revelation of the Christian faith.

He lived long enough to see the city of Jerusalem forever dethroned as the central seat of a nation’s worship and love and the temple to which the tribes had gone up so completely destroyed that there was no stone left lying upon another in that place where the religious authorities had

⁷⁹ Sheldon, *The Early Church*, p. 104.

⁸⁰ W. T. Davison, in Hastings’s single volume Dictionary of the Bible, p. 477.

hectored his Lord. He helped to spread the good news of a risen Christ and a deathless hope until the gospel had been carried from India on the east to Spain on the west. He had wished to call down fire upon a village of the Samaritans at one time during his Lord's ministry. He went with Peter to that village and other villages of the Samaritans and called down upon them the fire of the Holy Ghost after his Lord had risen from the grave. He came at last into the principal city of the western coast of the continent of Asia, the focus point of all the traffic East and West, the central headquarters of the Christian hosts of the Roman world. It was a city dedicated for centuries to the worship of the heathen goddess Artemis; but John took possession of it as the Christian bishop of the universal church, the most revered figure in the Christian world at the close of the first century.

Here it was that he wrote the books which represent the highest reach of inspiration and revelation in our New Testament. He was blessed above all others in coming nearer to the heart of our Lord than any other disciple. He has blessed the church above all others in revealing more of the mind and heart of our Lord than any other disciple could. That was his supreme privilege as the disciple whom Jesus loved. Godet has summed it up well in these words: "The hour for work had struck in the first place for Simon Peter; he had founded the church in Israel and planted the standard of the new covenant on the ruins of the theocracy. Paul had followed; his work had been to liberate the church from the restrictions of expiring Judaism and to open to the Gentiles the door of the kingdom of God. John succeeded them, he who had first come to Jesus, and whom his Master reserved for the last. He consummated the fusion of those heterogeneous elements of which the church had been formed, and raised Christianity to the relative perfection of which it was, at that time, susceptible. . . . Peter was distinguished by his

practical originating power, scarcely compatible with tender receptivity. Paul united to active energy and the most consummate practical ability the penetrating vigor of an unequaled dialectic. For, although a Semite, he had passed his earliest years in one of the most brilliant centers of Hellenic culture and had there appropriated the acute forms of the Occidental mind.

"John is completely different from both. He could not have laid the foundations of the Christian work, like Peter; he could not have contended, like Paul, with dialectic subtlety against Jewish rabbinism, and composed the Epistles to the Galatians and the Romans. But, in the closing period of the apostolic age, it was he who was charged with putting the completing work upon the development of the primitive church, which Peter had founded and Paul had emancipated. He has bequeathed to the world three works, in which he has exalted to their sublime perfection those three supreme intuitions in the Christian life: that of the person of Christ, in the Gospel; that of the individual believer, in the first epistle; and that of the church, in the Apocalypse. Under three aspects, the same theme—the divine life realized in man, eternity filling time."⁸¹

⁸¹ Commentary on John, vol. i, pp. 50, 53.

PART II

THE MOST REMARKABLE GOSPEL: THE GOSPEL
ACCORDING TO JOHN

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I. SOME REMARKABLE ESTIMATES

ORIGEN said, "This Gospel is the consummation of the Gospels as the Gospels are of all the Scriptures." Jerome asserts that "John excels in the depths of divine mysteries." Luther agrees, "It is the unique, tender, genuine, chief Gospel, far preferable to the other three. . . . Should a tyrant succeed in destroying the Holy Scriptures and only a single copy of the Epistle to the Romans and the Gospel according to John escape him, Christianity would be saved." Biedermann declares it is "the most wonderful of all religious books."¹ Herder said it was "written by the hand of an angel"; but that is not true. It was written by the hand of a man; but that man was a seer and a saint.

Culross, who has written a volume entitled *John Whom Jesus Loved*, says, "I believe the writings of John have been blotted by more penitents' tears and have won more hearts for the Redeemer than all the rest put together";² and he has collected into a paragraph the expressions of affection and admiration for the fourth Gospel made by many men. Two of these we quote. One writer says, "It is the chief of the Gospels and one can understand it only by reclining on the bosom of Jesus." Another declares, "It stands out from the other Gospels as the Sabbath among the other days of the week, as the office of the priesthood among the other functions of the sons of Levi, or like the

¹ Christian Dogmatics, p. 254.

² p. 212.

gleaning of the grapes of Ephraim, which was better than the vintage of Abiezer.”³

We add the words of Matthias Claudius: “I love best of all to read in John. There is in him something so perfectly wonderful—dusk and night, and the quick lightning throbbing through them: the soft clouds of evening, and behind the mass the big full moon bodily; something so sad, so high, so full of presage, that one can never weary of it! In reading John it always seems to me that I see him before me, reclining at the Last Supper on the bosom of the Lord, as if his angel held the light for me, and at certain parts would place his arm around me, and whisper something in my ear. I am far from understanding all I read, yet often John’s idea seems to hover before me in the distance; and even when I look into a place that is entirely dark, I have a presension of a great, glorious meaning, which I shall some day understand, and hence I catch so eagerly at every new exposition of the Gospel according to John.”⁴ This suggests what Tholuck said about the Gospel: “This Gospel speaks a language to which no parallel whatever is to be found in the whole compass of literature, [such childlike simplicity, with such contemplative profundity] such life, and such deep rest; such sadness, and such serenity; and above all, such a breadth of love, an eternal life which has already dawned, a life which rests in God, which has overcome the disunion between the world that is and the world to come, the human and the Divine.”⁵ W. T. Davison declares: “The fourth Gospel is unique among the books of the New Testament. In its combination of minute historical detail with lofty spiritual teaching, in its testimony to the Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the preparation it makes for the foundations of Christian doctrine, it stands alone. Its

³ Culross, p. 106.

⁴ Culross, pp. 106, 107.

⁵ Commentary on John, Introduction, p. 18.

influence upon the thought and life of the Christian Church has been proportionately deep and far-reaching. It is no disparagement of other inspired Scriptures to say that no other book of the Bible has left such a mark at the same time upon the profoundest Christian thinkers, and upon simple-minded believers at large.”⁶

James Drummond is one of the more recent writers on the fourth Gospel and he says: “Whether we regard the sublimity of its thought, the width and spirituality of its conception of religion, the depth of its moral insight, or the tragic pathos of its story, we cannot but feel that we have before us the work of a master mind. And when we remember how it has molded the faith and touched the heart and calmed the sorrows of generations of men, we must approach it with no ordinary reverence, and with a desire to penetrate its inmost meaning and become more thoroughly imbued with its kindling power.”⁷

Dr. Armitage Robinson says: “We would not willingly give up for any other form of narrative a Gospel which reveals to us what the Christ grew to be in the mind of one who leaned upon his bosom in youth, had cherished a perpetual recollection of him throughout long years of toil and suffering for his name, and at the close wrote as in his Master’s very presence his testimony to what his Master had been and forever should be—the Light and the Life of men.”⁸ Dr. A. T. Pierson gives his estimate of the fourth Gospel in these words: “It touches the heart of Christ. If Matthew corresponds to the Court of Israel, Mark to the Court of the Priests, and Luke to the Court of the Gentiles, John leads us past the veil into the Holy of holies. Here is the inmost temple, filled with the glory of God.”⁹

⁶ Hastings, *op. cit.*, p. 477.

⁷ Character and Authorship of the Fourth Gospel, p. 1.

⁸ The Study of the Gospels, p. 157.

⁹ Keys to the Word, p. 103.

These three writers, Drummond, Robinson, and Pierson, are writers of our own generation, and they represent widely different schools of thought. Drummond is a Unitarian, Robinson belongs to the Church of England, and Pierson is an old-school Presbyterian. They agree in their high esteem for the fourth Gospel, and in so doing they agree with the saints and scholars and commentators who preceded them. Philip Schaff said: "The best comes last. The fourth Gospel is the Gospel of Gospels, the holy of holies in the New Testament. . . . The Gospel according to John is the most original, the most important, the most influential book in all literature. . . . It is simple as a child and sublime as a seraph, gentle as a lamb and bold as an eagle, deep as the sea and high as the heavens."¹⁰ And Lange declared, "Since Irenæus it has remained for the sons of the apostolic spirit the crown of the apostolic Gospels."¹¹ One reason for these remarkable estimates of the value of the fourth Gospel is that all Christians have felt that Schenkel was right when he said, "Without this Gospel the unfathomable depth, the inaccessible height of the character of the Saviour of the world would be wanting to us, and his boundless influence, renewing all humanity, would forever remain a mystery."¹² As we read we are assured that here at last is the worthy and adequate picture of the life of Jesus among men.

II. SOME REMARKABLE OMISSIONS

If the four Gospels are the most precious books in the world's literature and the fourth Gospel is the most precious of the four, it must be a very remarkable book indeed. We turn to its study with great expectation. It is a Life of Jesus of Nazareth, and it is a most inadequate biography.

¹⁰ History of the Christian Church, vol. i, pp. 675, 688.

¹¹ Addresses on John, p. 482.

¹² Schenkel, A Sketch of the Character of Jesus, p. 34.

It is too small a book to tell us half the things we would like to know. It leaves out more than it puts in. It is much smaller than any of the standard biographies of to-day. We turn to our library shelves to look at some of the books by way of comparison; and we find that Boswell's Life of Samuel Johnson has 1,824 pages, and Allen's Life of Phillips Brooks has 1,596 pages, and Smith's Life of Henry Drummond has 534 pages. The Life of our Lord by the apostle John occupies less than thirty pages in our Revised Version. It is a mere pigmy beside these giant books. The average modern biography is fifteen, twenty, fifty, sixty times as long as this biography written by John.

When we turn to our modern lives of Jesus the difference is just as apparent. The Prophet of Nazareth, by Nathaniel Schmidt, has 422 pages; the Life of Jesus, by Dawson, 452 pages; Holtzmann's has 542 pages; The Days of His Flesh, by David Smith, has 593 pages; The Life of Our Lord, by Andrews, has 651 pages; Strauss's Life of Jesus has 784 pages; Beyschlag's has 970; Farrar's has 988; Weiss's has 1,143; Geikie's has 1,236; Edersheim's The Life and Times of Jesus has 1,524 pages; and Keim's Jesus of Nazareth has 1,904 pages. John has told us all he cared to say in thirty pages; and at the same time he says that if all had been written which might have been written, the world itself could not contain all the books covering the theme.¹³ Evidently, John has thought best to leave out much interesting material.

These other books are from more than ten to more than sixty times as long as the fourth Gospel, and the most of their material is worth while, and they tell us in detail about many things of which John makes mere mention or which he never notices at all; and yet the fourth Gospel is worth all of these other books put together! We put that down as the first remarkable thing about this remark-

¹³ John 21. 25.

able book—that it is so small and fragmentary and inadequate a biography. A mountain of barren rock may be imposing because of its size and yet not be as valuable as a single nugget of pure gold. [The fourth Gospel is pure gold.] It has no admixture of alloy. It is a residuum. John has chosen to free it from much that we would have supposed rightly belonged in it.

Let us look at some of these remarkable omissions.

1. To begin with, John omits the whole record of the first thirty years of the life of Jesus. He gives us no genealogy, no account of the annunciation, and he never suggests that there was such a thing as an immaculate conception. He tells us nothing about the infancy and youth of our Lord, nothing about his development of mind and soul, his early environment and teaching. These were the most important years of his life to Jesus himself, but John says nothing about them!

2. John tells us how Jesus meets the Baptist at the Jordan, but he has told us nothing about the early life or ministry of the forerunner, as he tells us nothing about his later imprisonment and death. We learn about these things from the other evangelists; but we feel sure that John knew more about the message and work of the wilderness prophet than any other of the New Testament writers. He has not chosen to tell us a word about John the Baptist until some time after the baptism of Jesus; and he gives us no direct account of that baptism, but only a reference to it as a past event in the experience of the Baptist himself.

3. In the fourth Gospel there is no mention of the temptation in the wilderness. It was one of the capital events in the life of our Lord. It was one of the crises in his spiritual experience. It would seem that John must have been fascinated by the account Jesus gave of it; but we never would know from this Gospel that he ever had heard of such a thing.

4. After the temptation the transfiguration was the next

most important event in the ministry of Jesus. John was one of the three apostles chosen to witness this wonder; yet he gives us no account of it in his narrative. We are wholly dependent upon the other Gospels for all that we know about it.

5. We learn from the other evangelists that John was one of the chosen three who were present at the raising of the daughter of Jairus to life. It was one of the chief miracles of Christ's ministry; but John says nothing about it.

6. There is no institution of the Lord's Supper in the fourth Gospel. John gives us a fuller account of the happenings at the last supper of Jesus with his disciples than anyone else has recorded for us, but he says never a word about the establishment of any solemn ordinance to be observed in the future history of the church.

7. There was that terrible Gethsemane agony and prayer, the closing struggle of the man Jesus with the powers of darkness, ending with the same triumph which had marked that beginning struggle in the wilderness. John omits the account of the agony and prayer as he omitted all mention of the conflict and victory there.

8. Since John's whole book was written that men might believe that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God, it is most strange that he omits all mention of that sublime declaration of the Messiahship and of the power of world judgment made by Jesus in his trial before the Sanhedrin. We would have supposed that that testimony would have been beyond value for the purposes of John's biography. He omits it altogether.

9. John gives us no account of the ascension. He records the promise made by Jesus to Mary, "I ascend unto my Father and your Father, and my God and your God,"¹⁴ but this climaxing event of the whole history of this mar-

¹⁴ John 20. 17.

velous life is not described either in general or in detail by John.

What a strange biography this is! How could anyone write a life of Jesus which would be worth anything at all and omit from the narrative all account of the virgin birth and the baptism and the temptation and the transfiguration and the Gethsemane agony and the glorious ascension to the right hand of God! Surely, these events are too important to be omitted by any biographer! Are they? Here is the most precious biography of Jesus we have, and it tells us about none of them, and we are not half through with our list of the remarkable omissions which characterize the Gospel according to John!

10. In the two and a half years of the public ministry of Jesus there are at least ten months which are an utter blank in John's narrative. In all probability Jesus said just as wonderful things and did just as wonderful deeds in these months as in those which John has recorded, but John leaves them entirely out of his story. There were over a thousand days in the Lord's ministry, and John has given us a record of only about twenty of them. [Seven chapters of his Gospel]—one third of the book—are devoted to the account of one day, counting from sunset to sunset as the Jews did, and thus including the night of the betrayal and the day of the crucifixion. We rejoice in the full record of this day, but how many important days must have been left wholly unrecorded!

11. There are no children in the fourth Gospel. The third Gospel has been called the Gospel of Childhood, and in all the synoptic Gospels the children appear again and again. Jesus blesses them and says that of such is the kingdom of heaven. He takes them into his arms. They are attracted to him. They love him, and in the triumphal entry into Jerusalem in the last days they precede the Master shouting, "Hosanna to the son of David"; and in the temple they continued to cry, "Hosanna in the highest,"

until the chief priests and scribes became indignant and Jesus was moved to defend these little ones for their hearty if noisy praise. We are glad that the Gospel pages have the figures of these innocent little ones dancing and prancing through them; and when we turn to the Gospel according to John we feel a distinct disappointment when we find that the children have wholly disappeared from the picture of the ministry of Jesus. If John lived and died an unmarried man, he had no children of his own, and he may not have had that personal liking for all children which Jesus always manifested. Anyway, he has written a Gospel story without a child in it from beginning to end.

12. There are no demoniacs in the fourth Gospel. The synoptics have frequent accounts of demonized individuals and the casting out of demons is a characteristic miracle in the ministry of Jesus. There are no exorcisms in the Gospel according to John. His enemies say to Jesus, "Thou hast a demon,"¹⁵ but this unreal, falsely charged demoniacal possession is the only one recognized or mentioned in the book.

13. There are no lepers in the fourth Gospel. The cleansing of a leper was a most marvelous miracle, and the other gospel writers detail the power of Jesus in accomplishing this impossible cure by a touch or a word; but John never mentions a single case of the kind. We never would have known from this Gospel that Jesus ever met any lepers or had anything to do with them in his ministry.

14. There are no scribes in the fourth Gospel. We learn from the synoptics that the scribes always were present in the Lord's later ministry, plying Jesus with hard questions, spying upon his whole procedure as his bitter and unrelenting foes. If we decide against the genuineness of the paragraph concerning the woman taken in adultery, as most of

¹⁵ John 7. 20; 8. 48; 8. 52; 10. 20.

the authorities do, then the word "scribe" does not occur in the Gospel according to John from beginning to end.

15. There are no Sadducees in the fourth Gospel. They are found in the Gospels according to Mark and Matthew and Luke and in the book of Acts, but not here. We are told that they questioned Jesus and he silenced them. We read later how they questioned Jesus at his trial and he was silent before them, until they provoked him into the confession of his Messiahship. In the fourth Gospel they never appear or are never named from beginning to end of the narrative.

16. There are no publicans in the fourth Gospel. If the scribes were the enemies of Jesus, the publicans were his friends. He ate with them and consorted with them. They heard him gladly, for he preached good news for them as well as for any other class of society. The scribes murmured because Jesus feasted with the publicans; but neither the murmurers nor those who occasioned their murmuring find a place in John's narrative. We would have known nothing about them if we had been dependent upon John alone for our information concerning the ministry of our Lord.

17. There is no list of the twelve apostles in the fourth Gospel. Matthew, Mark, and Luke thought it worth while to record these names, and Luke has given the list twice, once in each of his books; but John omits it altogether.

18. There is no Sermon on the Mount in the fourth Gospel. That sermon was the most important manifesto of the Messianic king. It set forth the foundation principles of the new kingdom of God which he had come to establish on earth. John makes no reference to it anywhere in his book.

19. There is no prescribed formula of prayer in the fourth Gospel. Both Matthew and Luke have recorded that Jesus told the disciples when they prayed to say, "Our

Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name." John omits all prescription of ritual service, sacramental or devotional. We are dependent upon others for all of these things.

20. The main themes of the discourses of Jesus as recorded in the synoptics are the conditions of entrance into the Kingdom. These conditions are two in number—repentance and faith. Now, it is a strange fact that the Greek words for "repentance" and "faith," *μετάνοια* and *πίστις*, are not to be found in the fourth Gospel at all. The ideas they represent may be in the book, but the words themselves do not occur. According to Luke, Jesus said, "I am not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance."¹⁶ In John this call is not recorded. The Greek word for "faith," *πίστις*, is used three hundred and forty times in our New Testament, but it does not occur once in the Gospel according to John. Some people would have difficulty in presenting the gospel without using the words "repentance" and "faith." John does it, and without any difficulty at all.

21. Another item of what some people would consider a most essential element in the presentation of the gospel is entirely omitted by John. He never has a word to say about hell from the beginning to the end of his book. Neither Hades nor Gehenna or Tartarus finds any place in his pages.

22. There are no detailed eschatologies in the fourth Gospel, such as we find in the synoptics. Here, instead of their predictions of the Parousia, we have the promise of the Paraclete. The coming of the Comforter is substituted for the coming of the Judge and King.

23. There are no proverbs in the fourth Gospel, such as we find in the synoptics. Those sharp and pointed sayings which have pierced to the heart and have stuck to the

¹⁶ Luke 5.32.

memory of all succeeding generations of men are wholly lacking in the Gospel according to John.

24. There are no parables in the fourth Gospel. Jesus acts parables here, but he does not narrate them.

Who would undertake to write a Gospel and say nothing about the birth of Jesus and nothing about his infancy and youth, his baptism, his temptation, his transfiguration, and his ascension; and omit all mention of the cleansing of lepers and the casting out of demons, and never introduce any children or scribes or Sadducees or publicans into the narrative, and leave out the Sermon on the Mount and the eschatological discourses and all the proverbs and all the parables? Who would undertake to write a Gospel without any of these things in it? Surely, nothing much worth while would remain. Surely, the result of any such effort would be a poor affair indeed. Almost all of the choicest portions of the life and teachings of Jesus would be untouched. Take these things out of the synoptic narratives and there would be a very pitiful remnant of their biography left. It would be an emasculated and mangled and altogether unworthy presentation of the work and words of Jesus. We are glad that the synoptics have told us about all of these things. We would not undertake to write a Gospel which omitted them. We could not do it, and make a book worthy of our Lord. John could; and John did! He wrote a Gospel without any of these things and not only made it worthy of a place in the canon, but made it the chief treasure of the New Testament books!¹⁷

¹⁷ We have called the fourth Gospel a Life of Jesus, and such it is. We have said it was a very inadequate biography, and it surely is. However, to be fair to the apostle John, we ought to add that his primary purpose in writing was neither biographical nor historical, but religious. He wrote that men might believe and have life (John 20. 31), and no one will question the adequacy of his Gospel to that end. As Drummond says, "It is not its object to tell us all that can be learned about the life of Jesus, but to awaken or strengthen our faith in him" (pp. 21, 22).

III. SOME REMARKABLE NEW FEATURES

It is a most remarkable Gospel because of the things it omits. It is the most valued of all the Gospels because of the things it adds to the synoptic narratives. It has been estimated that ninety-two per cent of the contents of the fourth Gospel are peculiar to itself. John has omitted much of great worth, but in its stead he has brought us a new treasure of such inestimable value that, like the ruler of the feast at Cana, we are constrained to say that the best has come last. Good as the synoptics were, we prefer John's narrative to any one of them.

Let us note some of the remarkable new features of the fourth Gospel now.

1. The parables are the poems in our Lord's preaching, the bright spots in the landscape of the synoptic narrative, like clusters of flowers in the open fields. John has no parables, no imaginative stories wrought out in detail to illustrate some truth or point some moral. He has, instead, new metaphors, strange personifications, centering for the most part about the Master himself, in which the bread and the vine, the gate, the door, the good shepherd, the light, and the truth either represent him or are identified with him.

2. Instead of the proverbs found in the synoptics, John introduces us to the discussion of metaphysical problems. For the most part the discourses of Jesus as recorded by him are not occasioned by the happenings of the day. They have a character of timelessness about them which has caused this Gospel to be called the "gospel of eternity."

3. Instead of the public discourses of the synoptics, we have in the fourth Gospel a number of private conversations. There are fourteen of these in all. Jülicher has called our attention to the fact that these conversations for the most part seem to be built up after a certain scheme or pattern. First, there is an introductory question; second,

Jesus answers with a statement which is capable of a double construction; third, this answer is misunderstood; fourth, Jesus explains and sets the misunderstanding straight; fifth, he proceeds to give fundamental instruction upon the theme.¹⁸ The longest discourses recorded in the fourth Gospel and the most precious in the book are those given to the disciples in private just before the betrayal in Gethsemane.

4. Instead of the Disciple's Prayer, Our Father who art in heaven, we have the Lord's Prayer, the longest prayer of Jesus and the only prayer recorded at any length in any of the Gospels, in the seventeenth chapter of this book.

5. There are eight miracles recorded in the fourth Gospel, and six of them are new. These new miracles are: Turning water into wine (chapter 2), Healing the nobleman's son (chapter 4), Healing the man at the pool (chapter 5), Healing the man born blind (chapter 9), Raising of Lazarus (chapter 11), and the Draught of fishes (chapter 21). John does not call these miracles. He calls them simply signs or works.

6. There are some new persons in this Gospel: Nathanael (chapter 1), Nicodemus (chapter 3), the woman of Samaria (chapter 4), the impotent man (chapter 5), the blind man (chapter 9), and Lazarus (chapter 11). All of these are to be found in this Gospel alone. The name of Malchus occurs only in the fourth Gospel; and Thomas and Philip and Judas, not Iscariot, are more prominent in this Gospel than in any other.

7. There are some new titles in this Gospel. John alone calls Jesus the Logos and the Only-Begotten, and he alone calls the Holy Spirit the Paraclete. John tells us much not recorded elsewhere about the work of the Paraclete in the world, but the name of the Holy Spirit occurs in his writings less often than in the writings of Luke and of Paul.

¹⁸ John 2. 19; 3. 3; 4. 10; 4. 32; 6. 34; 13. 36; 14. 5.

In the fourth Gospel the Holy Spirit is named only four times.

8. There are whole sections of this Gospel whose material is entirely new. The prologue, the testimony of John the Baptist to the Lamb of God, the first disciples (chapter 1), the Cana miracle and the first cleansing of the temple (chapter 2), the conversation with Nicodemus and the first ministry of Jesus in Judæa (chapter 3), the conversation with the woman at the well and the second Cana miracle (chapter 4), the healing of the impotent man and the discourse on world-judgment (chapter 5), the discourse on the bread of life (chapter 6), the discourse at the feast of tabernacles and its results (chapter 7), the discourse on the light of the world and its results (chapter 8), the healing of the blind man and its results (chapter 9), the discourse on the good shepherd (chapter 10), the raising of Lazarus and its results (chapter 11), the visit of the Greeks and the subsequent discourses of Jesus (chapter 12), the washing of the disciples' feet (chapter 13), the farewell discourses with the disciples (chapters 14, 15, and 16), the Lord's prayer for the church (chapter 17), the two appearances to the assembled disciples in Jerusalem after the resurrection (chapter 20), the appearance at the sea of Tiberias and the epilogue (chapter 21). These are simply the principal sections of new material, not paralleled in any of the synoptics; and they form the greater part of the fourth Gospel.

9. In the Passion history John makes his closest approach to the synoptic narrative, but even here he has many new items of information. He alone tells us that those who came to arrest Jesus in Gethsemane went backward and fell to the ground when Jesus advanced upon them. He alone records that it was Simon Peter who smote off Malchus's ear. He alone records the statements made to Pilate about the kingdom of the truth, a kingdom not of this world. He alone has written down Pilate's Ecce Homo,

"Behold the man!" He alone tells us about the division of the garments of Jesus among the soldiers. He alone has recorded the thoughtfulness of Jesus in providing a home for Mary the mother after his death. He alone saw the pouring forth of the water and the blood from the wounded side of Jesus. He alone tells us how Nicodemus assisted in the burial of the Lord.

This will be sufficient to indicate how much we are indebted to the apostle John for new and interesting and important information concerning the life and death of Jesus. The fourth Gospel is remarkable for the new light it throws upon the ministry of our Lord. It regards that ministry from a new point of view. It looks upon it through new eyes, the eyes of a seer and a saint. John listened to the words of Jesus even as the others did; but his ears were opened to hear as they did not hear. He heard the hidden harmonies. He saw into the very heart of things. He realized the supreme marvel of it all, and he gave it a most beautiful setting when he undertook to put it into writing for others to read and enjoy.

IV. A REMARKABLE WORK OF ART

The fourth Gospel has been called the "supreme literary work of the world." The theme was worthy and the writer was a choice spirit and he did his best to make his story duly simple and sublime. The fourth Gospel is remarkable as a work of art. This has been recognized by the critics. Chrysostom said of the fourth Gospel: "John has pervaded and embraced the whole world, he has filled it with his cry, not by the greatness of the sound, but by a tongue moved by divine grace. And what is wonderful is that this great cry is not harsh, not destitute of sweetness, but sweeter and more charming, endowed with more power to attract than all the harmony of music; and besides all these, it is most holy and awe-inspiring, filled with such secrets, con-

veying such good things, that those who receive and guard it with diligence and earnestness are no longer men, no more abide upon earth: they have placed themselves above the things of time, they are partakers of the state of angels, and thus dwell upon earth, as if it were heaven.”¹⁹ There is something of the extravagance of oratory in these statements, and yet they express the overflowing gratitude and love of many souls to John.

Augustine is almost as unstinted in his praise. He says: “John, as if it oppressed him to walk on earth, has opened his words as it were with a burst of thunder, has lifted himself not only above earth and every sphere of sky and heaven, but even above every host of angels, and every order of invisible powers, and reaches to Him by whom all things were made, as he says, ‘In the beginning was the Word,’ etc. He proclaims other things in keeping with this great sublimity with which he begins, and speaks of the divinity of our Lord as no other person has spoken. He pours forth that into which he had drunk. For not without a reason is it mentioned in his own Gospel, that at the feast he reclined upon the bosom of his Lord. From that bosom he had in secrecy drunk in the stream, but what he drank in secret he poured forth openly.”²⁰ Jülicher, in his Introduction, says, “We have here a kind of dramatic creation.” Westcott declares: “This gospel is, in fact, the divine Hebrew epic. Every part is impressed with the noblest features of Hebrew poetry, and the treatment of the subject satisfies the conditions of variety, progress, and completeness, which, combined with the essential nature of the subject itself, make up the notion of a true epic.”²¹ We think it might be compared better with the Greek epic and drama. All must grant that the fourth Gospel is a work of literary art.

¹⁹ Prooem. in Hom. in Iohan.

²⁰ Tract. 36 in Iohan.

²¹ Introduction to the Study of the Gospels, p. 275.

This is manifest in the following particulars: 1. Its artistic form. It observes all the finer laws governing the artistic composition of the ancient classical tragedies. As in these, the catastrophe is announced in the beginning, and the whole action of the narrative tends irresistibly toward the tragic close. As in the Iliad and the Niebelungenlied, and as in the tragedies of Æschylus and Sophocles, the terrible outcome always is kept in sight. The shadow of the cross falls upon the first page. The certainty of the hero's horrible death confronts us at every turn. The first time the man Jesus appears he is heralded as a Lamb appointed for sacrifice. At the marriage feast his "hour" is not yet come, but its dread significance is present in his mind. When he feeds the multitude, that joyous occasion is marred in their memory by his discourse on eating his flesh and drinking his blood. Most of the action is confined to the doomed city of Jerusalem. Galilee might lie bathed in the sunshine, filled with the glory of lilies and the singing of birds; but over Jerusalem the clouds were gathering, big with thunder, and the lightning flashes darted through them like travail-pains. John did not sit down consciously to compose a tragedy. He was telling a true story. He was recording a genuine biography; but in the telling he is artistic in fuller measure than the synoptics ever were. In the recording he follows the laws of the highest literature. He gives life, color, movement to his narrative. His book has the freshness and the simplicity and the beauty and the power of the primitive masterpieces of the world's writing.

2. A second manifestation of artistic composition in the fourth Gospel is to be found in its concentration of action. Note how the action is concentrated in the progress of the story. There are two great divisions of the book. In the first division, chapters 1-12, both time and place are manifold. The public ministry of Jesus touches the three provinces of the land and the three years of his activity. In

the second division, chapters 13-20, the action is centered in the one city of Jerusalem, and a large part of it is confined to one room; and the time is limited to one evening and a few days. More and more the scene narrows from the whole land to Judæa, and from Judæa to Jerusalem, and in Jerusalem to the one upper room of the farewell discourses; and the interest intensifies as the narrative lengthens and the crisis is nearer and nearer at hand.

3. Notice the symmetry of John's composition. This is apparent in the recurrence of certain characters and the nice balancing of the parts. Nathanael's name appears in the preface and the appendix, in the introductory chapter and in the concluding chapter, and nowhere else. The mother of Jesus is seen only in the beginning and at the end of the Gospel. At the opening of his public ministry Jesus attends a feast with his disciples and gives a demonstration of his power. At the end of his ministry he is again at a supper with his disciples, and he gives to them a demonstration of his love.

4. Notice how this balancing of parts over against each other is accompanied by continuous contrasts throughout the narrative. The great contrast between faith and unbelief runs through the whole book, and the new characters as they are introduced range themselves alternately between believers and unbelievers, friends and foes. First the spying, critical representatives of the Pharisees, then the faithful and obedient disciples of John. The blinded leaders of the people stand over against the seeing blind man with his bold witness to the Messiahship of Jesus. The confession of Peter contrasts with the betrayal of Judas. The raising of Lazarus to life results in the dooming of Jesus to death. These contrasts occur in every chapter and help to give to the narrative its striking variety.

5. This variety of treatment is noticeable at many points. We instance only two. (1) Did you ever notice the variety of the seasons presented in this Gospel? In the beginning

of the activity of Jesus it is the spring, the time of the sowing of seed and the germination and growth of the grain. Later in the narrative we come upon the autumn and the feast of the ingathering of the fruits in the fall of the year. Then at the very height of the conflict between Jesus and the Jews we are expressly told that it was winter. Finally, with the resurrection and the glorification of Jesus, it is spring again. (2) A great variety is added to the composition by the alternation of incident and interlude, of story and sermon, of action and discourse. In the beginning we have two pictures introducing the light side and the dark side of the public ministry, the marriage feast at Cana and the scourging of the sellers in the temple. These two vivid presentations are followed by two conversations, one in the darkness of the night and the other in the glare of the full noonday, with Nicodemus and with the woman at the well. Through the Gospel there is this alternation of word and deed. At the end there are the solemn discourses with the disciples, followed by the still more solemn incidents of the trial and the crucifixion. There is a constant changing from action to speech and from the brighter to the darker aspects of the history. There is a continuous variety which never allows the interest to flag. It is an artistic composition as well as a narrative true to the life.

6. The hand of a master is apparent in the general grouping and the entire arrangement of the material in this Gospel. John himself declares that if all which Jesus said and did would be written, the world could not contain the books filled with the narratives of these things. Out of this incalculable wealth of material John has made a selection of scenes and sermons which will fit his purpose and be most suitable to his plan. It is in this selection and arrangement of material that the literary artist, as well as the saint and the seer, appears. He has brought this wonderful fullness of words and works into an amazingly brief compass. He has omitted all which seemed to him

accidental or unessential. He has united the ideal moments of the life of Jesus into one harmonious presentation of the Ideal Life. He has made a work of art as well as a Gospel of the Son of God.

V. OTHER REMARKABLE CHARACTERISTICS

This is surely a remarkable Gospel. It is remarkable for what it omits, and it is remarkable for what it adds to the Gospel narrative; and it is most remarkable in its artistic composition. Another feature distinguishes it from all the synoptics. 1. It has been called the Gospel of Apostolic Comment. John meditates upon all things which he sees and hears, and puts down his conclusions concerning them. We have a commentary along with a biography. It is the commentary of the philosopher of the twelve. Kaufmann calls John "the Plato of the inspired circle." It is the commentary of an apostle, and it is the commentary of a saint.

Sometimes, as in the third chapter, it is difficult, if not impossible, to distinguish between the words of Jesus and the words of John. There were no quotation marks in these ancient manuscripts, and without their aid it sometimes is very difficult to determine where direct speech ends and reflection upon it begins. This phenomenon is not altogether peculiar to John. A good illustration of it is found in the second chapter of the Epistle to the Galatians, where Paul tells us that he resisted Peter to his face and said certain things to him and then goes on to comment upon the situation involved. The critics and commentators cannot agree as to where the direct speech ends and the comment begins. However, there is more bewilderment of this sort in the fourth Gospel than in any other book of the New Testament.

John tells us what he has heard and then what he thinks of what he has heard, and we are at a loss to know in

many places whether Jesus or John is speaking. Is it not to the great glory of his Master that the disciple inspired by him speaks and writes so gloriously that the words seem almost like his own? "Matthew's Gospel is the child of memory; Mark's Gospel is largely the work of an amanuensis; Luke's Gospel is the production of a painstaking collector of oral and written data; John's Gospel is the result of the brooding of a philosophic mind over the deep things involved in the historical facts narrated by the other evangelists."²² Narration runs into reflection, and often there is nothing to indicate where the one ends and the other begins. History becomes homily, and there is no clear dividing line. It all seems of one piece. Jesus talks like John and John talks like Jesus.

Of course critics have suggested that this fact proves that the whole book is the reflection of John's mind rather than a cool and historical and objective presentation of actual truth. We have John rather than Jesus in these long conversations and discourses, they say. Why may we not believe that we have John become like Jesus in this book, so that it is Jesus rather than John whose spirit is apparent throughout? Then it is of little importance to us whether the words we read were spoken directly by Jesus or are appended to the words of Jesus as an interpretation or continuation by John. Whether Jesus said, "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him might not perish, but have eternal life," or whether John said it, we know that that sentence expresses the very heart of the gospel message and summarizes the whole of the teaching of Jesus. It is just as precious because it is just as true whether Jesus said it or John. If that is an apostolic comment, we do not hesitate on that account to reckon it one of the choicest texts in Scripture; and we value the Gospel of Apostolic

²² Teachings of the Books, p. 76.

Comment in the proportion in which it contains material like this.

2. The fourth Gospel is remarkable for its spirituality. Clement of Alexandria called it the "spiritual gospel." He said, "John, last of all, perceiving that what had reference to the bodily was sufficiently detailed in the Gospels, encouraged by his friends, and divinely incited by the Spirit, composed a spiritual gospel."²³ The synoptics are satisfied to tell the external incidents of the ministry of Jesus; John is not satisfied until he has reached some conclusion as to the inner and spiritual meaning of these things. They are objective in their treatment of their material; John always is subjective in his dealing with it. They are more concerned with the actions of Jesus; John is more concerned with the thoughts of Jesus. They give the foreground of the gospel picture and the figures most conspicuous in it; John puts in the background, stretching away into the eternities and revealing the spiritual depths from which all the gospel grace and truth have come.

It is the Gospel of Spiritual Insight. It has more of the words of Jesus, and the words chosen for record are the more weighty words concerning eternal life. "We must read this Gospel," said Donald Fraser, "while with joy, also with deep reverence, for heaven lies about us, and a cloud of glory hangs about the page. . . ."²⁴ The seventeenth chapter of this Gospel has always been regarded as a sort of Holy of holies in the Scripture, so full is it of sublime thought and Divine intimacy. Bengel said of it, 'In its words it is the most simple, but in its sense the most profound in all the Bible.'²⁵

This spiritual character of the entire Gospel helps to account for the fact that John says nothing at all about the institution of Christian baptism or the observance of the

²³ Eusebius, Hist. Eccl., vi, 14.

²⁴ Lectures on the Bible, vol. ii, p. 74.

²⁵ *Op. cit.*, p. 85.

Lord's Supper. John had little interest in forms and ceremonies. Institutional religion does not seem to attract him at all. Spiritual experience and the Christlike life are of incomparable importance with him. Liturgies and religious performances and rites fall out of sight in his writings. He omits any mention of them whatever. He deals with more weighty and more worthy things. Speaking generally, the same thing is true of the entire New Testament. There is less of prescribed ceremonial in the whole New Testament than in scores of single chapters in the Old Testament. John, however, represents this New Testament tendency full-grown. Origen said that no one could understand the fourth Gospel unless he reclined upon the bosom of Jesus and thus became a second John. One must have spiritual insight to appreciate the spiritual insight of this book.

Much modern criticism is disposed to emphasize the spirituality of the fourth Gospel at the expense of its historicity. It claims that the Gospel is a spiritual Gospel, not because it is devotional and inspirational, but because it is symbolical and allegorical. It claims that the author is aiming only at an ideal reproduction of the general impression made by the life of Jesus and that he is not interested in any merely historical details. In its treatment the Gospel of Spiritual Insight is apt to become only the Gospel of Imaginative Puerilities. It is amusing in the extreme to find critics of this school after a labored and sober discussion of the spirituality of this Gospel come to the conclusion that the author tells us that the disciples were two hundred cubits from the shore when the risen Lord appeared to them at the Sea of Galilee, because Peter had that distance to wade or swim to reach the Master's feet and in the Philonian lore two hundred signified "repentance"! Or, that he tells us that the net which they dragged to the shore held one hundred and fifty and three fishes, because that number is produced by adding together the figures from

one up to seventeen, or by adding the square of twelve to the square of three!²⁶ Men capable of such criticism are incapable of any true or deep appreciation of a spiritual gospel such as this which John has written. John is a mystic and a seer, and there are those who never seem able to realize that there is nothing in that fact inconsistent with his supreme loyalty to historical truth.

A mystic may be an honest man. Spiritual insight is perfectly compatible with historical verity. With the clearness of reminiscence characteristic of old age John recalls details like these we have just mentioned without any thought or suggestion of any symbolical significance in them, but simply because they are a part of the general picture of the event in his memory of it. No writer in the New Testament is more devoted to the historical truth than is John. He believed that grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.²⁷ He was a follower of Him who said, "I am the truth."²⁸ He had heard the Master pray, "Sanctify them in the truth; thy word is truth."²⁹ He believed that Jesus had come to bear witness to the truth, and he believed that only those who were of the truth would hear the voice of Jesus³⁰ and fellowship with him. He believed that, according to the Master's promise, the Spirit of truth would guide him into all the truth.³¹ Throughout his narrative there is all the guilelessness of perfect sincerity, all the simplicity of utter truthfulness. On every page there is the touch of reality. The historical trustworthiness of the Gospel has been presented by Askwith³² and Bleek³³ and Brooke³⁴ and

²⁶ See the article by W. R. Inge on the Gospel of John, in the Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels.

²⁷ John 1. 17.

²⁸ John 14. 6.

²⁹ John 18. 37.

³⁰ John 17. 17.

³¹ John 16. 13.

³² The Historical Value of the Fourth Gospel.

³³ Introduction, pp. 298f, 327f.

³⁴ Cambridge Essays on Biblical Questions, X.

Wendt³⁵ and J. Armitage Robinson,³⁶ and they have shown upon what insufficient grounds critics have concluded that John invented his incidents to teach and illustrate his theology while they have pointed out the abundant reasons we have to believe that John speaks the truth when he tells us of the things he himself claims to have seen and heard. They are ready to sign their names to the attestation at the close of the book, "This is the disciple that beareth witness of these things, and wrote these things: and we know that his witness is true."³⁷

3. Another distinguishing characteristic of the Gospel according to John is its simplicity of expression. No one of the Gospels is labored or pedantic or heavy in style, and yet no one of the synoptics equals the utter simplicity of the Johannine sentences. There is absolutely nothing which looks like striving after effect. The most profound truths are set forth in the most simple terms. There is no effort and no ornament. All is as simple as the twenty-third psalm. Yet there is an elevation in the thought, as of mountain peaks; a loftiness of sentiment and a sublimity of atmosphere, as in the heights. It is easier to read the Greek of this Gospel than that of any other. It is the book for beginners in the study of the language. The translation into English represents the simplicity of its expression in large measure. It is the book we put into the hands of new converts for their first study in the Scripture. Children can comprehend its truth. Catechumens find it full of inspiration and blessing. Yet it is a strange fact that it never loses its charm with continued study or with advancing years. Old people enjoy it even more than the young. Philosophers and profound theologians realize that there are treasures here which are not equaled on any

³⁵ Das Johannes-Evangelium, pp. 8f.

³⁶ The Historical Character of St. John's Gospel.

³⁷ John 21. 24.

other pages of Scripture and which will repay their closest thought and reward their deepest meditation.

4. We might put that down as another distinguishing characteristic of the fourth Gospel—its remarkable union of clearness and profundity of revelation. Strauss said that John was “a master of lucid obscurity,” but John never is obscure in his writing. As far as we can see, it is perfectly clear. If we cannot see through it, that is the fault of our sight. There is no cloudiness of thought and no hindrance to our vision as far as our insight is capable of discernment. The pages of the fourth Gospel are like the waters of Lake Tahoe—crystal clear but of unfathomable depths. They are like the clear heavens above us, filled with worlds which are hidden by the very excess of light. The child thinks he sees all of them and he rejoices in the sunshine and is satisfied with his fullness of light. The philosopher and the astronomer know that they see only an infinitesimal distance into the infinities of the celestial spaces, and it is their joy to search and search, that they may see more and more of their exhaustless fullness of light. It is thus with the writings of John.

Westcott says, “No writing perhaps, if we view it simply as a writing, combines greater simplicity with more profound depths.”³⁸ Philip Schaff says of the fourth Gospel, “No book is so plain and yet so deep, so natural and yet so full of mystery. It is . . . deep as the sea and high as the heavens.”³⁹ It was Bishop Hopkins who said of the Bible, “It is a ford wherein a lamb may wade, and a sea wherein an elephant may swim”; and “that rare scholar” Robert Boyle said of the Word of God, “It is a matchless volume; it is impossible that we can study it too much, or esteem it too highly.” These sayings can be applied to the Gospel according to John in fullest measure.

Adolph Saphir has written an appreciation of the spirit

³⁸ Introduction to the Study of the Gospels, p. 255.

³⁹ History of the Christian Church, vol. i, p. 688.

and the style of John in these words: "There is a simplicity which is the result of full and profound knowledge, of varied experience and conflict; a simplicity which is the indication of abundance and depth, which is the result of meditation, prayerfulness, and a humble walk with God. They who are fathers in the church, who, like the apostle John, lean on the bosom of Jesus, who behold the glory of the Only-Begotten, and in singleness of heart rest in his love, reach a lofty and calm mountain height, and they express their knowledge and experience with great simplicity and brevity. We often fancy we understand their quiet and axiomatic words, or that we have fathomed their meaning, and yet we may only have come into contact with the surface. The apostle John is thus the simplest and deepest teacher in the church. Like the Sabbath day, he appears among the disciples; a solemn, yet childlike quiet and simplicity characterize his words; we meet with no complicated arguments, no noise and struggle, no upward steep ascent from earth to heaven, law to grace, Levitical type to Melchizedek perfection; we are transplanted at once into the high region of God's light, love, life. These simple yet inexhaustible words are the constantly recurring realities of which he testifies. To reach this simplicity is the object of the Christian individual and of the Christian Church."⁴⁰ Simplicity, clearness, and profundity—these are the three principal characteristics of the revelation of this remarkable book.

5. John has a most remarkable literary style. We will note some of its peculiarities. (1) A fondness for choice words. John has a comparatively limited vocabulary. He uses the same words again and again. These words, however, are choice words, capable of a great variety of meanings and uses. So that Simcox declares: "John has imperfect command of Greek idiom, but a very adequate com-

⁴⁰ Saphir, Epistle to the Hebrews, vol. i, pp. 305, 306.

mand of the Greek vocabulary. He frames his sentences as he can, but he chooses his words as he will.”⁴¹

As examples of the words characteristic of the Johannine vocabulary we subjoin the following, with the number of times they are used in the Gospel : *σάρξ*, flesh, eight times ; *σκοτία*, darkness, nine times ; *σημεῖον*, sign, seventeen times ; *μένειν*, to remain, eighteen times ; *κρίνειν*, to judge, nineteen times ; *ἔργον*, work, twenty-three times ; *φῶς*, light, twenty-three times ; *θεωρεῖν*, to behold, twenty-three times. This verb is found only fifteen times in all the synoptics put together. John is the Apostle of Insight, and this verb is a favorite with him. “*Όνομα*, name, occurs twenty-five times ; *ἀληθεία*, truth, twenty-five times ; *δόξα*, glory, and *δοξάζεσθαι*, to glory, forty-two times ; *μαρτυρία*, witness, and *μαρτυρεῖν*, to witness, forty-seven times ; *ζωή*, life, and *ζῆν*, to live, fifty-two times ; *γινώσκειν*, to know, fifty-five times ; *κόσμος*, world, seventy-eight times, while in all the synoptics it occurs only fifteen times. *Πιστεύειν*, to believe, occurs ninety-eight times in the fourth Gospel—twice as often as in all the synoptics put together. This is all the more remarkable when we remember that the noun *πίστις*, faith or belief, is not found in the Gospel at all.

These words belong to John’s carefully chosen, specially prized, and constantly used treasury of important terms. He prefers them to others. He repeats them as often as he chooses. He rings the changes upon them from the beginning to the end of his book. They represent spiritual realities to him. They have a great depth of meaning and are capable of development along many lines of thought.

(2) As with words, so with ideas. Certain ideas seem to cling to certain persons or things in John’s mind. We may call this peculiarity, fondness for a refrain. Whenever the relatives of Jesus are mentioned, something is said about his “hour.” Whenever the rulers are introduced,

⁴¹ The Writers of the New Testament, p. 74.

their "unbelief" is emphasized. Whenever Judas appears, his betrayal is recalled and something is said about "Satan" or "the devil." If John the Baptist comes into view, his testimony is immediately mentioned; it is always as a witness that he appears. In every decisive moment Jesus utters the refrain, "I am—." Whether as a word of comfort or as a word of authority it comes in again and again like the *motif* of a symphony. These refrains recur in every part of the narrative, and stand as finger-posts pointing out the course of thought or boundary stones marking the chief divisions of the book. They show that in John's mind in connection with every figure and every scene the central fact or significance of it absorbed his attention to the exclusion of every other thing. He was as single in thought as he was single in heart. That was essential to the making of a Boanerges.

(3) We notice, as a third peculiarity, a fondness for the mystic numbers three and seven. Farrar says, "Almost all the subsections of the Gospel run in triplets,"⁴² and then he quotes from Keim, "Jesus is thrice in Galilee, thrice in Judæa, twice three feasts take place during his ministry, and particularly three passover feasts—in the beginning, the middle, the end—which either foretell or procure his death. He works three miracles in Galilee and three in Jerusalem. Twice three days is he in the neighborhood of John; three days are covered by the narrative of Lazarus, and six by the fatal passover. He utters three sayings on the cross, and appears thrice after his resurrection." Holtzmann adds these triplets to the list: "The Prologue begins with three propositions; three divisions are expressly made of the discourse on the last day of Tabernacles; three disclosures of the traitor are made by Jesus; three times he is himself condemned; three times Pilate attempts to save him; three days he lies in the tomb."⁴³

⁴² Messages of the Books, p. 112.

⁴³ Einleitung, p. 438.

Seven times in this Gospel the Lord says, "I am—": "I am the bread of life" (6. 48); "I am the light of the world" (8. 12); "I am the door of the sheep" (10. 7); "I am the good shepherd" (10. 11); "I am the resurrection and the life" (11. 25); "I am the way, and the truth, and the life" (14. 6); "I am the true vine" (15. 1). Only seven apostles are mentioned by name in this Gospel, if we except Judas, who seems in John's representation to stand alone, outside the sacred number. Seven of the apostles go fishing after the crucifixion, and that perfect number meet the Lord and are, like Peter, recommissioned for service.

Westcott says, "It is not fanciful to see a significance in the number of miracles" recorded in this Gospel. There are seven in Christ's ministry, and an eighth after the resurrection. To the Hebrew seven was the figure of the complete and perfect whole, and eight was the figure of the resurrection or the new birth.⁴⁴ Some of these suggestions may be open to criticism; but it is true that the Hebrew mind delighted in these symbolic numbers to a degree almost incomprehensible in the Occident; and there are enough of these numbers in the arrangement of John's material to show that he was a true Hebrew at this point.

Looking the Gospel through carefully we find that there are seven witnesses cited for the validity of the claims of Jesus: the witness of the forerunner, John the Baptist (1. 7; 5. 33), the witness of the Father (5. 34, 37), the witness of the Son (8. 14; 18. 37), the witness of the works (5. 36; 10. 25), the witness of the Scripture (5. 39-46), the witness of the Spirit (15. 26; 16. 14), the witness of the disciples (15. 27; 19. 35).

There are seven noteworthy confessions of faith peculiar to this Gospel: John the Baptist's "Behold the Lamb of God" (1. 29); Andrew's "We have found the Messiah" (1. 41); Nathanael's "Rabbi, thou art the Son of God"

⁴⁴ Introduction to the Study of the Gospels, p. 284, n.

(1. 49); the report of the officers sent to arrest him, "Never man so spake" (7. 46); the blind man's profession, "Lord I believe" [that Jesus was the Son of God] (9. 38); Martha's cry of faith, "I have believed that thou art the Christ, the Son of God" (11. 27); and last of all Thomas's triumph over every doubt in the exclamation of adoring faith and love, "My Lord and my God" (20. 28). Did it just happen that the number seven occurs in all these cases? It is strange that it happens so many times, so strange that the probability would seem to be that it is no happening, but, rather, that it is intentional. This fondness for Hebraic number grouping becomes all the more likely when we notice other Hebraistic characteristics in the style of John.

(4) Schaff points out that in this Gospel "the parallelism of Hebrew poetry is very apparent in such double sentences as: 'Peace I leave with you; my peace I give unto you' (14. 27); 'A servant is not greater than his lord; neither one that is sent greater than he that sent him' (13. 16); 'All things were made through him; and without him was not anything made that hath been made' (1. 3). Examples of antithetic parallelism are also frequent: "The light shineth in the darkness; and the darkness apprehended it not" (1. 5); "He was in the world, . . . and the world knew him not" (1. 10); "He confessed, and denied not" (1. 20); "I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish" (10. 28).⁴⁵

(5) There are Hebraistic forms of expression. The verb "to know" is made to express spiritual union. The phrases "to be in" or "to abide in" express moral dependence. These are pure Hebraisms. "To rejoice with rejoicing" and the Greek phrase for "forever" are Hebraic in origin. Twenty-five times in this Gospel and nowhere else in the New Testament we find Jesus beginning his speech

⁴⁵ History of the Christian Church, p. 699.

with a "Verily, verily." This is the double Hebrew "Amen, amen."

(6) John is Hebrew again in his liking for straightforward constructions. The Greek delighted in logical development and in subtle connections of thought. The Hebrew preferred simplicity of statement. The Greek language has a multitude of particles to assist in the expression of the relation of the several portions of an intricate sentence to the central thought. For the most part John ignores all help of this sort. He uses a very few of these particles and usually is content with the simple conjunction *καὶ*, "and." He adds sentences to each other rather than connects them with each other. Instead of saying, "The light shineth in the darkness; but the darkness apprehended it not" (1. 5), he says, "The light shineth in the darkness; and the darkness apprehended it not." Instead of saying, "Though Jesus was in the world, yet the world knew him not" (1. 10), he says, "He was in the world, . . . and the world knew him not." Instead of saying, "We bear witness of that which we have seen, but ye receive not our witness" (3. 11), he says, "We . . . bear witness of that which we have seen; and ye receive not our witness." Instead of saying, "Jesus taught in the temple publicly and openly, and yet, though it was so easy to do it, no one laid hands on him" (8. 20), he says, "He taught in the temple: and no man took him."

It is comparatively easy to write Greek in this fashion, and in the fourth Gospel the Greek is comparatively good, but it is all of this unambitious, straightforward sort. John writes Greek after the Hebrew style and he does not involve himself in any difficulties because he moves along straight lines and confines himself to the simplest constructions. It is correct but kindergarten Greek. John writes in Greek, but thinks in Hebrew. He chooses good words and writes good sentences, but they are of the kind which any beginner might construct.

These Hebrew sacred numbers, Hebrews parallelisms, Hebrew forms of expression, and Hebrew constructions indicate clearly enough that the writer of the fourth Gospel, though he used the Greek language, was himself a Hebrew, accustomed to Hebrew literature, and with Hebrew habits of thought. Nothing could be farther astray than Renan's judgment that the style of this Gospel "has nothing Hebrew, nothing Jewish, nothing Talmudic." Ewald states the truth when he says, "In its true spirit and afflatus, no language can be more genuinely Hebrew than that of John." Godet says: "Though Greek in its forms, the style is nevertheless Hebrew in its substance. . . . In the language of John, the clothing only is Greek, the body is Hebrew; or, as Luthardt says, there is a Hebrew soul in the Greek language of the evangelist."⁴⁶ Schaff discusses the style of the fourth Gospel and concludes, "It is pure Greek in vocabulary and grammar, but thoroughly Hebrew in temper and spirit, even more so than any other book, and can be almost literally translated into Hebrew without losing its force or beauty."⁴⁷

VI. OCCASION AND AIM

What was the occasion which led John to write this fourth Gospel? 1. The first answer ever given to that question in the literature of the early church is found in the Muratorian Fragment, whose date probably is about A. D. 170. The writer of the Fragment says that John wrote at the request of his fellow disciples and bishops in Asia Minor. His account is as follows: "At their entreaties John said, Fast with me for three days from this time, and whatever shall be revealed to each of us, let us relate it to one another. On the same night it was revealed to Andrew, one of the apostles, that John should relate all

⁴⁶ Commentary on John, p. 138.

⁴⁷ *Op. cit.*, p. 690.

things in his own name, aided by the revision of all. . . . What wonder is it, then, that John brings forward each detail with so much emphasis even in his epistles, saying of himself, 'What we have seen with our eyes and heard with our ears and our hands have handled, these things have we written to you'? For so he professes that he was not only an eyewitness, but also a hearer, and, moreover, a historian of all the wonderful works of the Lord in order."⁴⁸

2. A somewhat different reason for John's writing is given by Jerome in the Preface to his Commentary on Matthew: "The last [of the Gospel writers] is John, the apostle and evangelist, whom Jesus loved most, who, reclining upon the Lord's bosom, drank the purest streams of doctrine. . . . When he was in Asia, at the time when the seeds of heresy were springing up (I refer to Cerinthus, Ebion, and the rest who say that Christ has not come in the flesh, whom he in his own epistle calls Anti-Christ, and whom the apostle Paul frequently assails), he was urged by almost all the bishops of Asia then living, and by deputations from many churches, to write more profoundly concerning the divinity of the Saviour, and to break through all obstacles so as to attain to the very Word of God (if I may so speak) with a boldness as successful as it appears audacious. Ecclesiastical history relates that, when he was urged by the brethren to write, he replied that he would do so if a general fast were proclaimed and all would offer up prayer to God; and when the fast was over, the narrative goes on to say, being filled with revelation [*revelatione saturatus*, "having been saturated with revelation"], he burst into the heaven-sent Preface, In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God: this was in the beginning with God."⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Ante-Nicene Fathers, vol. v, p. 603.

⁴⁹ Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series, vol. vi, p. 495.

The writer of the Muratorian Fragment suggested no other reason for John's writing than that his friends and disciples desired him to put into permanent form the teaching they had come to value so highly; for they esteemed him the fittest medium of the gospel revelation to be found in the apostolic company. It is interesting to note the occurrence of Andrew's name in this connection. It was Andrew, according to the story told in the first chapter of this Gospel, who was with John when the two first approached Jesus. It is Andrew, according to the story told in this tradition, who is with John in his old age here in Ephesus and to whom the divine indication is given that it was the will of God that John should write as the church desired. The two names are joined in this way at the very beginning and at the very end of their gospel ministry. Evidently it is this tradition upon which Jerome builds his statement, but he adds that it was the growth of heresy in their neighborhood which led the church officials to present this request to John. The Gospel was written, he says, not only to be a medium of revelation but also to be a weapon of defense. It was to be didactic and it was to be polemic as well.⁵⁰

3. Eusebius, in his Church History, suggests a third reason for John's writing, namely, that of supplementing the imperfect accounts given by the synoptics. He says: "The three Gospels already mentioned having come into the hands of all and into his own too, they say that John accepted them and bore witness to their truthfulness; but that there was lacking in them an account of the deeds done by Christ at the beginning of his ministry. . . . They say, therefore, that the apostle John, being asked to do it for this reason, gave in his Gospel an account of the period

⁵⁰ Irenæus, *Adv. Haer.*, III, ii, 1, had suggested that John wrote to "remove the error" of Cerinthus and the Nicolaitanes. Erasmus, Hengstenberg, Grotius, Hug, De Wette, Ebrard, Ewald, Lange, and Alford lay emphasis on the polemical design of the Gospel.

which had been omitted by the earlier evangelists, and of the deeds done by the Saviour during that period.”⁵¹

It is evident that these three reasons are not necessarily inconsistent with each other. John may have been requested to write a Gospel in which he would be a teacher, a polemic, and a historian. Those who heard him may have considered his teaching too valuable to be lost when he died, and one reason for that may have been that it contained so much which the synoptics did not mention and so much which was opposed to the heretical perversions of the truth which some already were venturing to promulgate in the church. John may have had all of these things in mind as he composed this fourth Gospel. He may have aimed to give a supplementary, a more spiritual, a more serviceable account of the life of Jesus, one which would present the truth of that life more faithfully and one which would refute all errors concerning that life in so doing.

1. He states his aim in writing in the closing words of the Gospel: “Many other signs therefore did Jesus in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book: but these are written, that ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye may have life in his name.”⁵² This is the authoritative statement of the aim of the Gospel. We add two other statements as probably the best conclusions of scholarship on this subject. 2. Bernhard Weiss said: “The aim is to set forth the glory of the divine Logos, as John had beheld it in the earthly life of Jesus, as it had more and more magnificently revealed itself in conflict with unbelieving and hostile Judaism, and as it had led receptive souls to a faith ever more firm and to a contemplation ever more blessed.

⁵¹ Eusebius, Church History, III, 24. Michaelis, Beyschlag, Westcott, and Salmon believe that the Gospel was intended to supplement the synoptic accounts.

⁵² John 20. 30, 31.

This is what the evangelist desires.⁵³ That statement recalls the words of John 1. 14, "We beheld his glory," or, more literally: "We theatrized his glory. We gazed upon it with all the absorbing interest and with all the rapt attention and with all the conscious delight with which men enjoy the best and highest type of theatrical representation." It was such a drama as this old Globe Theater never had seen before, and the glory of it had filled John's eyes. Something of that glory he has been able to put into his written page. 3. Luthardt said: "John would picture Christ as the Son of God in the absolute sense; that is, as the one who has come from God himself and who stands in absolute God-fellowship. All the fullness of the divine life is in him and is communicated through him. He is therefore the object of the faith which is absolutely necessary to salvation."⁵⁴

VII. CONTENTS

The Central Thought of the Gospel is the incarnation, the Word become flesh, the Son of God as the Son of man. The Central Figure of the Gospel is that of Jesus the Divine Revealer and the Human Brother throughout. Jesus is in the midst and on either side two, Faith and Unbelief. Here are The Three Factors which make up the entire composition. All that John says is to show how and why some believed in the claims and the teachings of Jesus, and also how and why others refused to believe. The reasons for faith, the possibilities of faith, the development of faith are pictured on the one hand and the sin and suicide of unbelief are pictured in their development and sad fruition on the other hand. Jesus is God incarnate. The Father was in him and spoke through him. Jesus represents the highest reach of the Divine revelation.

⁵³ From notes taken in lecture room in Berlin.

⁵⁴ From notes taken in lecture room in Leipsic.

Faith in him, therefore, is an absolute necessity to perfect salvation.

There is more of Jesus in the fourth Gospel than there was in the synoptics. The keynote in them was the kingdom of God; the keynote in John is the Son of God. In the synoptics Jesus speaks much about the Kingdom and its claims, and he says comparatively little about himself and his claims. In John he says comparatively little about the Kingdom and its claims, and he talks much about himself and his claims. In the synoptics his speeches often begin with the words, The kingdom of heaven is like unto this or that. In John these words do not occur, but we hear Jesus saying again and again, "I am the Bread, the Door, the Good Shepherd," and so on. There it is "the Kingdom"; here it is "I." To John the person of Jesus is of central and supreme importance. All the interests of the Kingdom, in earth and heaven, depend upon him.

Upon these three factors, the Divine Manifestation in Jesus, faith in him, and unbelief manifesting itself in hostility to him, we build our Outline of the contents of the fourth Gospel: 1. The prologue, presenting Jesus as the Logos revelation in human flesh (1. 1-18). 2. Jesus reveals himself as the Messiah (1. 19 to 4. 54). 3. The growing revelation, together with the growing faith of the disciples and the growing unbelief of the Jews (chapters 5-12). 4. Faith consummated; the last discourses with the disciples, and Judas expelled (chapters 13-17). 5. Unbelief of the Jews consummated in the arrest, trial, and crucifixion of Jesus (chapters 18, 19). 6. The resurrection appearances in Jerusalem. The perfect triumph of faith when doubting Thomas believes (chapter 20). 7. The Epilogue. Appearance at the sea of Tiberias, and the attestation (chapter 21).

We suggest the following chapter and paragraph outline, the paragraphs being those of the American Revised Version.

1. The Chapter of Beginnings. There are three clearly distinguishable subjects treated in this chapter; first, the Logos doctrine, "In the beginning was the Word"; second, the witness of John the Baptist; and, third, the First Disciples. Subdividing the second and third heads into two paragraphs each, we have five paragraphs in the chapter, as follows: (1) The Logos Revelation through Incarnation. (2) The witness of John the Baptist to his own relation to the Messianic movement. (3) The witness of the Baptist to the Person of the Messias. (4) Andrew, John, and Peter. (5) Philip and Nathanael.

2. The Beginning of Signs. (1) The Cana miracle. (2) Capernaum visited. (3) Cleansing of the temple. (4) Confidence refused.

3. Nicodemus chapter. (1) Conversation of Nicodemus with Jesus. (2) Comments by the evangelist John. (3) Conversation of John the Baptist with his disciples. (4) Comments by the evangelist John.

4. The Woman at the Well chapter. (1) Conversation of the woman with Jesus. (2) Conversation of the disciples with Jesus. (3) The Samaritan revival. (4) Jesus goes from Samaria into Galilee. (5) Healing of the nobleman's son.

5. The Sabbath chapter. (1) Jesus goes to a Jerusalem feast. (2) He heals an impotent man on the Sabbath day. (3) He defends himself against the charge of Sabbath-breaking. (4) He preaches a Sabbath sermon, declaring that the power of life and judgment is given to the Son, and (5) proclaiming the fourfold witness to himself.

6. The Bread of Life chapter. (1) Jesus feeds the five thousand. (2) He withdraws into the mountain. (3) He walks upon the sea. (4) He preaches in the synagogue at Capernaum that he is the bread of life. (5) The Jews murmur and he tells them that the bread he will give is his flesh. (6) The Jews debate this statement, and he tells them they must eat his flesh and drink his blood. (7)

The disciples murmur, and he tells them the flesh profiteth nothing, for it is the spirit that gives life. (8) Many disciples desert him, but Peter confesses that he is the Holy One of God.

7. The Feast of Tabernacles chapter. (1) Jesus refuses to go with his brethren to the feast. (2) He goes in secret and hears the questioning of the multitude concerning him. (3) He teaches publicly in the temple, and defends himself. (4) The multitude divided in opinion about him. (5) On the last day of the feast Jesus cries, "If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink." (6) The officers sent to arrest him declare, "Never man so spake."

8. The Light of the World chapter. (1) The woman taken in adultery. (2) Jesus proclaims himself the light of the world. (3) He foretells his going away and his lifting up. (4) Controversy concerning Abraham. The Jews claim to be the children of Abraham and Jesus says they are the children of the devil, for they do not have Abraham's spirit and they do not do Abraham's works.

9. The Blind Man chapter. (1) Jesus heals a man blind from birth. (2) The blind man is brought before the Pharisees and is cast out of the synagogue. (3) He meets Jesus and confesses him to be Lord.

10. The Good Shepherd chapter. (1) Jesus talks of the sheepfold. (2) He declares himself the door of the sheep. (3) The Jews dispute as to whether he is a demoniac or divine. (4) At the feast of the dedication Jesus talks of his sheep, and the Jews would stone him, and he defends himself from the charge of blasphemy. (5) Jesus goes beyond Jordan.

11. The Lazarus chapter. (1) The death of Lazarus. (2) The resurrection of Lazarus. (3) Many Jews believe. (4) The chief priests and Pharisees in council decide to put Jesus to death. (5) Jesus withdraws to Ephraim.

12. The Last Public Events of the Ministry of Jesus. (1)

The anointing at Bethany. (2) The chief priests decide to put both Jesus and Lazarus to death. (3) The triumphal entry. (4) The visit of the Greeks, and the last public discourse of Jesus. (5) Comments by the evangelist John. (6) Summary of the preaching of Jesus.

13. The Last Supper chapter. (1) Jesus washes the disciples' feet. (2) Lessons of this incident. (3) Jesus foretells the betrayal and points out the betrayer. (4) He gives the new commandment. (5) He foretells the denial of Peter.

14. The Comforter chapter. (1) The Comforter comforts and promises another Comforter. (2) He bequeaths peace and commands rejoicing.

15. The True Vine chapter.

16. The Last Words chapter, the close of the farewell discourses with his disciples. Jesus declares (1) That it is expedient for him to go away, and (2) That he has overcome the world.

17. The Lord's Prayer chapter.

18. The Arrest and Trial chapter. (1) The arrest of Jesus. (2) Jesus led before Annas. (3) Peter's first denial. (4) Jesus questioned by Annas and sent to Caiphas. (5) Peter's second and third denial. (6) Jesus brought before Pilate. (7) Pilate questions Jesus. (8) Pilate would release Jesus.

19. The Crucifixion chapter. (1) Pilate vacillates but finally delivers Jesus up to be crucified. (2) The crucifixion. (3) The soldiers cast lots for his coat and Jesus commits his mother to the care of John (4) The death of Jesus. (5) The piercing of his side. (6) His burial by Joseph of Arimathaea and Nicodemus.

20. The Resurrection chapter. (1) The empty tomb. (2) The appearance to Mary. (3) The appearance to the disciples in the closed room. (4) The doubt of Thomas. (5) The appearance to Thomas and the other disciples. (6) The aim of the Gospel,

21. The Supplement chapter, or Epilogue. (1) The appearance at the Sea of Tiberias. (2) Conversation with Peter at this time. (3) The Attestation. (4) Disclaimer as to completeness.

VIII. THE JOHANNINE AUTHORSHIP DISPUTED

The greatest battle yet fought in the field of the higher criticism in the New Testament is that concerning the authorship of the Johannine books and more especially of the fourth Gospel. It has lasted for more than a century, and it is far from being ended to-day. In the field of the New Testament it corresponds in interest and in magnitude to the conflict which has been waged in the field of the Old Testament over the Mosaic authorship and the composite character of the books of the Pentateuch. In the Old Testament discussion the higher critics have won the day, and there is very general agreement now among all authorities that the Law in its present form is a comparatively late product in Jewish literature, and that many different sources or documents are to be distinguished in its composition, and that it is Mosaic only in remote origin or inspiration; and in certain circles the feeling seems to be prevalent that what has happened in the Old Testament also has happened in the New Testament. Many seem to think that the decisive victory won by the critics in the greatest conflict in the Old Testament field has been paralleled by an equally decisive victory in the greatest conflict in the New Testament field, and that the belief in the Johannine authorship of the fourth Gospel has been shattered as clearly and as completely as the belief in the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch. This is far from being the case.

The situation in all questions of criticism in the New Testament field is very different from that which obtains in the Old Testament. There we are dealing with the products of remote antiquity and we have few if any con-

temporaneous records, and we must depend almost wholly upon internal evidence for our conclusions concerning the authorship of the Old Testament books. The first external testimonies which we can adduce concerning the authenticity of these books are removed by so many centuries from the time of their composition that they can represent only extremely attenuated and correspondingly unreliable tradition. It is not so in the case of the New Testament.

The New Testament books were written in a literary age. The Christian literature is continuous, from the writings of the apostles through the writings of the church Fathers, the apologists, the historians, the commentators, and the scholars to the present time. We can adduce more or less conclusive external evidence for the authorship of New Testament books. The church tradition concerning these rests upon what the church deems reliable testimony, and any attack upon the tradition must overthrow the testimony first of all before any internal evidence can be adduced. In the case of the fourth Gospel we have direct statements as to its authorship among the writings of the church Fathers and direct and indirect quotations from it as of apostolic authority in the church, in writings reaching back to the very time of its composition. Upon what ground, then, has any question been raised concerning it? A brief review of the hundred years of discussion will answer that query.

One cannot but suspect that some at least of the opposition to the fourth Gospel has sprung from theological prejudices and dogmatic presuppositions. A hardheaded, prosaic critic naturally enough is disposed to run a tilt against the supernaturalism and the mysticism of the Johannine literature. Professor Davison closes his able discussion of the Johannine authorship of the fourth Gospel with this deliberate judgment: "Those who hold such views of God, of Jesus Christ, of history, and of the Christian religion, as to be able to accept the view that Jesus of

Nazareth was indeed the Son of God, the Word of God Incarnate, who wrought works that never man wrought and spoke words such as mere man never spoke, who died for our sins and rose again from the dead and lives now to impart the gift of that Spirit whom he promised—will find little difficulty in accepting the statement that John the apostle who saw the things recorded in the Gospel hath borne witness, and his witness is true. Those to whom such statements are upon other grounds quite incredible, and who ascribe them not to the religion of Jesus and his first disciples, but to the dogma of a period which had advanced beyond the teaching of Paul to a point which is characteristic of the second century, will naturally adopt any theory of authorship that the case allows rather than admit that the fourth Gospel was written by the son of Zebedee. Absolute demonstration is from the nature of the case impossible, but it may fairly be said that the external and the internal evidences combined are such as would in any ordinary case, and apart from all doctrinal prepossessions, be considered strong, if not conclusive, in favor of the Johannine authorship of the Gospel.”⁵⁵

The modern attack upon the authenticity of the fourth Gospel usually is said to have begun with the publication of a book by Edward Evanson, in 1792, entitled *The Dissonance of the Four Generally Received Evangelists, and the Evidence of Their Respective Authenticity Examined*. Evanson had been a clergyman in the Church of England and resigned his position on the ground that Christianity was too plain a thing to be taught as a lucrative occupation. Free from entanglement with any religious sect or party, advanced in years and claiming to have a mature judgment and an unbiased mind, he professed impartiality in his investigations. He decided that the Gospel according to Luke was authentic, but the other three Gospels were

⁵⁵ Hastings, *op. cit.*, p. 484.

"spurious fictions of the second century, unnecessary and even prejudicial to the cause of true Christianity, and in every respect unworthy of the regard which so many ages have paid to them."⁵⁶ He also decided that the Epistle to the Romans ought to be "expunged out of the volume" of the New Testament.⁵⁷ Almost no one has paid any regard to his mature and impartial judgment upon this subject. The Epistle to the Romans has been deemed authentic by practically all the scholars from his time to the present day. Comparatively little attention was paid to any other part of his book; but the thirty-three pages in it which had to do with the fourth Gospel marked the beginning of an enormous literature on the subject which has been increasing with every succeeding generation and of which there is no apparent diminution now.

The books immediately succeeding that of Evanson neither deserved nor received much notice. The attack was continued by a succession of German theological writers. In 1796 Eckermann⁵⁸ disputed the authenticity of the fourth Gospel in its present form; and he recalled his criticism in 1807.⁵⁹ In 1801 Vogel⁶⁰ summoned John and his interpreters before the Last Judgment, and decided the case against them. In 1808 Cludius⁶¹ and in 1812 Ballenstedt⁶² renewed the skirmish, but the great battle was still to come. In 1820 Bretschneider published a modest little book in Latin,⁶³ not for general reading but

⁵⁶ *Op. cit.*, p. 255.

⁵⁷ *Idem.*, p. 256.

⁵⁸ *Theologische Beiträge*, vol. v.

⁵⁹ *Erklärung aller dunkeln Stellen des N. T.*

⁶⁰ *Der Evangelist Johannes und seine Ausleger vor dem jüngsten Gericht.*

⁶¹ *Uransichten des Christenthums nebst Untersuchungen über einige Bücher des N. T.*

⁶² *Philo und Johannes.*

⁶³ *Probabilia de Evangelio et Epistolarum Joannis Apostoli indole et origine.*

for the judgment of the learned,⁶⁴ which was a profound and comprehensive attack upon the Johannine authorship and which, according to Weiss,⁶⁵ discussed with scarcely a single exception every important suspicion advanced by more modern criticism against the genuineness of the Gospel. Weiss calls it an epoch-making book, and it surely has been an arsenal of strength to all later opponents of the authenticity of the Gospel according to John.

Bretschneider decided that, in all probability, the Gospel was written by a presbyter in Alexandria in the middle of the second century. In the preface to his book he says: "But we ask you, kind reader, to believe that whatever conclusions we have come to, we do not regard them as the utterances of an oracle, but as things which seem probable after discussion. It is not that in our opinion the Gospel of John is spurious, but only that it *seems* to be so, though we should have preferred to write *is* more frequently instead of, for the thousandth time, repeating *seems*. For we expect, nay, we hope, that experts in criticism will teach us better wherever we may have made mistakes, and we will accept their corrections most willingly."⁶⁶ The event proved his entire honesty in making this promise; for when in the most comprehensive and satisfactory manner his objections had been answered by Lücke⁶⁷ and Tholuck⁶⁸ and Olshausen⁶⁹ and Crome⁷⁰ and Hauff,⁷¹ Bretschneider publicly withdrew his conclusions and declared that he was satisfied that the authenticity of the Gospel was fully established and the question might be

⁶⁴ *Eruditorum judiciis modeste subjicit*, is part of the title.

⁶⁵ Introduction to the New Testament, vol. ii, p. 389.

⁶⁶ *Probabilia*, preface, p. viii.

⁶⁷ *Commentar über die Schriften des Evangelisten Johannes*, 3rd ed.

^{1840.}

⁶⁸ *Commentar zum Evangelium Johannis*, 1st ed. 1827; 7th ed. 1857.

⁶⁹ *Die Echtheit der vier canonischen Evangelien*, 1823.

⁷⁰ *Probabilia haud Probabilia*, 1824.

⁷¹ *Die Authentie und der hohe Werth des Evangeliums Johannis*, 1831.

considered settled for the theological world.⁷² It would be well if some of the younger theologians of the present day would take a lesson from Bretschneider's modesty and open-mindedness, and with learning no greater, if not less, than his would quit posing as final oracles in this field, and substitute for their present positiveness and assumption something of his willingness to learn.

However, Bretschneider's withdrawal of his objections did not leave the field uncontested for any length of time. In 1835 Strauss's *Life of Jesus* appeared.⁷³ It dissolved the Gospel history into myths and, of course, proceeded upon the assumption that all of our Gospels were unauthentic. The specious calm which had prevailed for a few years was followed by a fierce renewal of the conflict. Tholuck⁷⁴ and Neander⁷⁵ and De Wette⁷⁶ helped Strauss to a renewed study of the fourth Gospel and in the third edition of his *Life of Jesus*, published in 1838, he expressed considerable doubt as to the validity of his former doubts concerning its authenticity. In the fourth edition, in 1840, however, he doubted the reasonableness of his doubts concerning his former doubts and went back to his previous position that the fourth Gospel could not have been written by the apostle John. One trouble with Strauss was that he had written what professed to be a critical *Life of Jesus* without any thoroughgoing criticism of the sources from which his information concerning that life had been obtained. That weakness was pointed out by Ferdinand Christian Baur and he proceeded to make good this deficiency in the work of the younger man.

⁷² *Handbuch der Dogmatik*, 3rd ed. 1828, p. 268, "die aufgestellten Zweifel können nun wohl als erledigt angesehen werden."

⁷³ *Das Leben Jesu kritisch bearbeitet*.

⁷⁴ *Die Glaubwürdigkeit der evangelischen Geschichte*, 1837; 2nd ed. 1838.

⁷⁵ *Das Leben Jesu Christi*, 1837.

⁷⁶ *Kurze Erklärung des Evangeliums und der Briefe Johannis*, 1837.

Baur was capable of herculean labors and he produced an almost incredible amount of scholarly and critical material. He held the chair of historical theology in the University of Tübingen. For more than thirty years he was the most influential leader in theological thought in Germany. His noble presence, his great ability, and his ardor for original investigation attracted many brilliant men to his classroom, and he became the founder of what was known as the Tübingen School, or the Tendency School in criticism. Zeller, Köstlin, Hilgenfeld, Volkmar, Pfeiderer, Scherer, Schwegler, Holsten, Scholten, Renan, and Samuel Davidson are among those who rallied to the standard raised by Baur, and it may be doubted whether any school of theology in these modern days ever had such a galaxy of brilliant supporters or ever seemed to have everything its own way to the extent in which Baur and his disciples appeared to sweep all before them in the middle and latter half of the past century. However, their seeming success lasted but little longer than their own generation.

Hilgenfeld probably was the most able and the most influential of the disciples of Baur, and when we visited his lecture room in the University at Jena in the last decade of the century, we found only two hearers there; and in conversation afterward the old man complained bitterly that the fashions had changed in theology and the once popular movement in which he had taken part was being discarded by the younger generation. To-day both the radical and the conservative scholars declare that the school as such is obsolete and no one professes adherence to its distinguishing tenets any more. The only sufficient reason for such a phenomenon as the sudden rise and brilliant course and utter collapse of the Tübingen School would seem to be that truth is mighty and will prevail in the end.

Baur overworked the tendency theory of the composition

of the New Testament books and dated most of them a hundred years or more too late. He thought that the Gospel according to John was composed either in Asia Minor or more probably in Alexandria in the years between A. D. 160 and 170. Volkmar put the date back to 155. Zeller and Scholten decided that it would be safer to say that the Gospel was written about 150. Hilgenfeld was compelled to retreat still farther, and he decided that the Gospel was composed in 130. Keim, after some hesitation, agreed with him. Weizsäcker, Schenkel, Hase, Reuss pushed the date of composition still farther back between the years 110 and 125. Trench by trench the allied forces of tradition and truth had pushed the enemy from the territory it had usurped in its first brilliant dash, until now the old lines are established once more. Renan concluded, "There is one thing at least which I regard as very probable, and that is that the fourth Gospel was written before the year 100,"⁷⁷ and Harnack says now that it was written not before the year 80 and not after the year A. D. 110.⁷⁸

This gradual lowering of the date until it has reached the limits prescribed by the earliest church tradition is indicative of the compelling power of the arguments and facts marshaled by the upholders of the Johannine authorship. The critics have been forced to retreat step by step until practically the last stronghold has been surrendered and the time is even now at hand which Bishop Lightfoot foretold, "when it will be discreditable to the reputation of any critic for sobriety and judgment to assign to this Gospel any later date than the end of the first century or the very beginning of the second."⁷⁹ What has discredited the judgment of these great men who were disposed to put

⁷⁷ Life of Jesus, p. xlvi.

⁷⁸ Chronologie, p. 680.

⁷⁹ The Fourth Gospel, p. 139.

the composition of the fourth Gospel at a more or less remote date in the second century and long after the death of the apostle John? A more thorough investigation of all the facts in hand and in addition several most interesting discoveries. Let us notice two or three of these.

IX. DISCOVERIES FAVORABLE TO AUTHENTICITY

1. Tatian was a disciple of Justin Martyr and lived in the latter half of the second century. He was the author of the Diatessaron, the presentation of the gospel history by a combination of the text furnished by our four Gospel narratives. Dionysius Bar Salibi, who lived at the end of the twelfth century, said that Ephraim of Edessa wrote a commentary on the Diatessaron which began with a comment on the sentence, "In the beginning was the Word." That meant that the Gospel according to John was one of the four Gospels used by Tatian in the composition of his harmony, and, if so, that it was of equal authority with the other three in the church of that age and, therefore, it must have had some standing in antiquity and could not have been composed in that period in which the Diatessaron itself was constructed, as Baur had concluded.

It was easy enough to say that the statement of Dionysius was too late to be of any authority and so rule it out of court; and as long as no manuscript of the Diatessaron was forthcoming that contention might be allowed to stand. However, Ephraim's commentary upon the Diatessaron was in existence in an Armenian translation in a monastery in Venice, and the Mechitarist Fathers there published it in 1836. There are not many Armenian scholars in Europe, and this publication attracted no notice until Ezra Abbot and Harnack brought it to the attention of the learned world in 1880. It contained the substance of Tatian's Diatessaron and confirmed the statement of Dionysius as to its use of the fourth Gospel with the other three.

Great excitement was aroused by this discovery, and the discussions which followed led to the further discovery of an Arabic manuscript of the Diatessaron itself in the Vatican library. This in turn led to the discovery of a very beautiful Arabic manuscript in Egypt, and, being brought to Rome, it was published at the time of Pope Leo XIII's jubilee in 1888. It was apparent at once that the Diatessaron proved that the Gospel according to John was not first coming into existence in A. D. 170, as Baur had suggested, but that it was already in existence in A. D. 160, and of equal standing with the other three, and that these four Gospels had established themselves in the church with an authority shared with no other books of this kind. That meant that they had been handed down from the preceding generations and it seemed more than likely that the Memoirs of the Apostles, which Justin Martyr said were read in the public services of the Christians, were the Gospels thus highly honored by his pupil Tatian.

2. Baur and Zeller and Schwegler and Hilgenfeld and Renan all denied that any quotations from the fourth Gospel could be found in the Clementine Homilies. Only nineteen of them were known, and the parallels of language in these were open to question and were strenuously denied by the Tübingen School. Then a twentieth Homily was discovered and published, and it contained a quotation from the fourth Gospel so plain that it had to be acknowledged by all.

3. The Philosophumena of Hippolytus was discovered at Mount Athos in 1842, and when its contents had been fully discussed it was agreed by almost all critics that it contained first-hand quotations from Basilides, the Gnostic heretic of the first quarter of the second century. When that had been decided, it was apparent that in these quotations from Basilides there were quotations from the fourth Gospel, and even Keim acknowledged that the fourth Gospel existed in the time of Basilides and that the Gnostics

were making use of the book.⁸⁰ That meant that it was of recognized authority at this early date.

All the discoveries of the past century in this field have proved to be favorable to the Johannine authorship of the book. No discovery has given any aid to the opponents of that fact. Now that the composition of the fourth Gospel is acknowledged by all parties to fall into the period covered by the last years of the apostle John, spent, according to church tradition, in Ephesus, the battle against the Johannine authorship must shift its ground. If the Gospel existed from this early time, as all now admit, it could have been written by the apostle himself, if he were living and in Ephesus at this date. In the latest attacks upon the authenticity of the book the attempt is made to prove that John never lived in Ephesus, and that he did not live to a great old age, but was martyred at the same time with his brother James and comparatively early in the history of the church.

X. WAS JOHN AN EARLY MARTYR?

Schwartz fixed the date of his martyrdom at A. D. 44,⁸¹ and Wellhausen calls his discussion of the subject a demonstration.⁸² This theory of the early martyrdom of John is quite a favorite among radical critics to-day, and it is defended by Pfleiderer,⁸³ Bousset,⁸⁴ Johannes Weiss,⁸⁵ Menzies,⁸⁶ Jülicher,⁸⁷ Schmiedel,⁸⁸ Loisy,⁸⁹ Moffatt,⁹⁰

⁸⁰ *Jesu von Nazara*, vol. i, p. 144.

⁸¹ *Tod der Söhne Zebedaei*, 1904.

⁸² Commentary on Mark 10. 39.

⁸³ *Urchristenthum*, vol. ii, p. 411.

⁸⁴ *Theologische Rundschau*, 1905, pp. 225f.

⁸⁵ Commentary, on Mark 10. 39.

⁸⁶ Commentary, on Mark 10. 39.

⁸⁷ Introduction, pp. 377f.

⁸⁸ *Encyclopedia Biblica*, pp. 2509, 2510, and *The Johannine Writings*, p. 177.

⁸⁹ *Revue de l'histoire des religions*, 1904, pp. 568f.

⁹⁰ Introduction, pp. 601f.

Burkitt,⁹¹ and Bacon.⁹² What proofs have these men for such a conclusion? Only three, and these are all very questionable.

1. The first is the fact that Jesus said to James and John, "The cup that I drink ye shall drink,"⁹³ and these critics feel sure that such a prophecy would not have been allowed to remain in the gospel record if it had not been literally fulfilled, or else that the prophecy was formulated and foisted into the gospel record after the double martyrdom. They do not hold that James and John were literally crucified, as Jesus was; but they think that the prophecy demands literal martyrdom for both of them, whether it antedates or postdates the event. Origen did not think so. He considered the sufferings which John endured for the cause a sufficient martyrdom to prove his participation in the cup which the Master drank.⁹⁴ Jerome declared that John in spirit failed not of martyrdom and thus drank the cup of confession.⁹⁵ What right has anyone to say that only literally fulfilled prophecies are recorded in our Gospels? Such a conclusion is wholly subjective, and in the face of clear statements to the contrary in a multitude of the church Fathers the assumption of John's early martyrdom upon such a basis as this is utterly unwarranted.

2. The church tradition represented by the testimony of numbers of the church Fathers is that John lived to extreme old age. Is this tradition unanimous? Is there no voice raised in denial of that fact? These critics think they have one testimony which, being early, will outweigh all the later testimonies to the contrary. They think they have the testimony of Papias; but when we ask them where

⁹¹ The Gospel History and its Transmission, pp. 252f.

⁹² The Fourth Gospel, Part I, chap. v.

⁹³ Mark 10. 39; Matt. 20. 23.

⁹⁴ Commentary, on Matt. 20. 23.

⁹⁵ Commentary, on Matt. 20. 23.

this testimony is to be found, we are told that it is found in a passage in the writings of Georgius Hamartolus, of the ninth century, and when we read the passage itself we find that George the Sinful is bearing his testimony to the truth of the general tradition that John lived in his old age in the reigns of Domitian and Nerva in the city of Ephesus.

We quote the passage in full: "After Domitian, Nerva reigned one year; and he, having recalled John from the island, dismissed him to live in Ephesus. Then, being the only survivor of the twelve disciples, and having composed the Gospel according to him, he has been deemed worthy of martyrdom. For Papias, the Bishop of Hierapolis, having become an eyewitness of this one, in the second book of the Oracles of the Lord, declares that he was slain by the Jews, having evidently fulfilled with his brother the prediction of Christ concerning him, and his own confession and assent in regard to this. For when the Lord said to them, Can ye drink the cup which I drink?, and when they readily assented and agreed, Ye shall, he says, drink my cup, and be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized; and this is as we should expect; for it is impossible for God to lie. And so also the very learned Origen, in the commentary on Matthew, affirms that John hath suffered martyrdom, intimating that he has learned this from the successors of the apostles. And, indeed, also the highly learned Eusebius says in the Ecclesiastical History, Thomas has had Parthia assigned to him; John, Asia, with whom having lived he ended his days in Ephesus."⁹⁶

This, then, is the testimony of George the Sinful, that John the apostle lived in Ephesus as late as the days of the Emperor Nerva, A. D. 96-98. He evidently has no thought of saying that John died in A. D. 44, at the same

⁹⁶ For the Greek, see Lightfoot, *The Apostolic Fathers*, p. 519.

time with his brother James. He says that John was the last survivor of the apostolic twelve, and he declares that John was the author of the Gospel accorded to him. In all of these things he is in line with the church traditions concerning these matters, and in no one of these things are the modern critics willing to follow his authority. They think he is absolutely untrustworthy at every one of these points. Yet with unhesitating enthusiasm they pin their faith to his quotation from Papias, and they interpret this quotation to mean that John and James were martyred together.

Papias, as reported by Georgius in this passage, does not say that. He simply says in this quotation that John was slain by the Jews and when he was slain he fulfilled with James the prediction of Christ. It is evident that George the Sinful did not think when he made this quotation that Papias was contradicting what he himself had just said, that John was the only survivor of the twelve. That would have been impossible if James and John had suffered martyrdom together. The interpretation of the critics, then, is not the interpretation of George the Sinful. Would it not be fair to infer that he never would have made this quotation if their interpretation of it had been the correct one? Then, who can tell whether he has quoted Papias correctly? If he is untrustworthy in all these other statements, why not here?

Our doubt at this point is strengthened when we remember that he quotes another authority for the fact of John's martyrdom. His second authority is no less than the learned Origen. Why do not the critics quote Origen, then, as well as Papias as a witness to the martyrdom of John with James? Because we have the passage which George the Sinful quotes from Origen, and when we consult the original we find that George has misunderstood and misinterpreted Origen, who says that John's exile to Patmos and his sufferings there were a sufficient martyr-

dom in themselves to fulfill the Lord's prophecy concerning the cup he should drink, and who has no slightest intimation that John was killed by the Jews either at the same time with James or at any later date. If George the Sinful misrepresents Origen, may he not equally misrepresent Papias?

The church Fathers, Irenæus, Eusebius, and the rest, had the writings of Papias in their hands, and yet they all agree that John lived to old age in Ephesus, and no one of them ever hints that Papias or anyone else ever had said anything to the contrary. Is it conceivable that all of them would have been silent concerning any contradictory statement of Papias, and utterly ignoring it, would have united in the propagation of what they knew to be an untruthful tale? Is it not altogether more probable that they knew that Papias agreed with all other ancient authorities in this matter?

If a ninth-century author of the character of Georgius Hamartolus is to be given any credence at this point, why may we not quote other ninth-century authority on the other side of the question? The upholders of the "Papias-tradition," so called, for the most part preserve a discreet silence concerning the argument to the fourth Gospel contained in a Vatican manuscript of the ninth century which reads, "The Gospel of John was revealed and given to the churches by John while he still remained in the body, as one named Papias, of Hierapolis, a beloved disciple of John, related in his five books of Expositions."⁹⁷ Here is another ninth-century authority to be set over against Georgius Hamartolus. Is it not likely to represent the truer tradition in the case? We are assured here that Papias himself witnesses to the authorship of the fourth Gospel by John. Papias was a contemporary of Polycarp, and, like Polycarp, he may have been twenty-five years old

⁹⁷ Thomasius, Works, vol. i, p. 344, and Pitra, *Analecta*, ii, 160.

when the fourth Gospel was composed. They may both have known all about it, and if they did, of course their testimony would agree, for they were both good men and true.

We are not so sure of George the Sinful. Moffatt believes that George the Sinful is not to be trusted in his report of what Origen said,⁹⁸ but he holds with all tenacity to his trustworthiness in the report of what Papias said, though that report as interpreted by himself stands in flat contradiction to the unanimous church tradition on this subject. He says that it is confirmed by a late epitomizer of Philip of Side. The Chronicle of Philip was written in the fifth century and the epitome of it was produced in the seventh or eighth century, and it says, "Papias in his second book says that John the divine and James his brother were killed by the Jews."

Now, in the first place it is almost certain that this quotation cannot be an exact quotation, for all are agreed that the apostle John was not called "John the divine" earlier than the close of the fourth century, and therefore it would seem to have been impossible for Papias in the second century to make use of this much later title; and in the second place, Philip of Side, like George the Sinful, is acknowledged on all hands to be inaccurate and unreliable and utterly valueless as an authority over against such trustworthy testimony as that given by Irenæus, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, Eusebius, Augustine, Jerome, and the other church Fathers. Shall we cast all of these aside in order to give heed to much later writers who stand convicted of carelessness and inaccuracy, men surely not of equal standing in the church and confessedly capable of erroneous statements proving their utter lack of critical insight and personal unreliability?

The "Papias-tradition," upon which Moffatt and Burkitt

⁹⁸ Introduction, p. 604.

and Bacon lay such stress, turns out to be of the most precarious if not preposterous foundation, if it can be called a foundation at all; and it is not strange that sober scholarship, represented by such men as Lightfoot⁹⁹ and Harnack¹⁰⁰ and Zahn,¹⁰¹ rejects its validity without any hesitation.¹⁰² If the argument from prophecy is puerile and futile, and the argument from Papias savors more of wild invention than it does of firm foundation, is there any other reason which can be suggested for thinking that John and James were martyred together?

3. With all seeming gravity these critics refer us to the church calendars in which James and John are commemorated together as martyrs. Moffatt concedes that their evidence is not as good as that from the prophecy and the "Papias-tradition"—and we feel like asking, Could any evidence be worse than this?—but he thinks that they serve to corroborate substantially the tradition which they embody.¹⁰³ Sir William Ramsay says with all reason, "That James and John, who were not slain at the same time, should be commemorated together, is the flimsiest conceivable evidence that John was killed early in Jerusalem. The bracketing together of the memory of apostles who had some historical connection in life, but none in death, must be regarded as the worst side, historically speaking, of the martyrologies."¹⁰⁴ These martyrologies were made up by combinations of local calendars and date from the fourth and fifth centuries and were intended for convenience in church anniversary celebrations and not for final authorities as to historical fact; and a cause must be desperate indeed

⁹⁹ Essays on Supernatural Religion, p. 211.

¹⁰⁰ Die Chronologie, II, i, 662f.

¹⁰¹ Introduction, vol. iii, pp. 205, 206.

¹⁰² Also Abbott, Davison, Drummond, Sir William Ramsay, J. Armitage Robinson, Stanton, and Workman.

¹⁰³ Introduction, p. 606.

¹⁰⁴ The First Christian Century, p. 49, n.

which will need to bolster itself up on any such untrustworthy props.

The supposedly literally fulfilled prophecy of Jesus, the indefinite and garbled and almost certainly incorrect report by Georgius Hamartolus and Philip Sidetes of what Papias said, and the questionable corroboration of the late church calendars—these are the three converging lines of evidence upon which the most modern of our critics seem chiefly to depend for reasons for their faith that John the apostle died in early life and therefore never lived in Ephesus and never wrote the fourth Gospel. Is it not fair to presume that with no better proofs than these in hand this criticism will be as obsolete in another generation as the Tübingen criticism is in our own?

If the church Fathers are right in saying that John the apostle lived to old age in Ephesus, and if the best authorities are agreed that the fourth Gospel must have come into existence some time near the close of the first century there in Ephesus, how shall we escape the conclusion that the Gospel was written by the apostle John himself? There is still one refuge left for those who are determined to deny the authorship of the fourth Gospel to the apostle. If the net result of a century of criticism has been to prove that the church tradition was correct and that the fourth Gospel was written in Ephesus by John, it is still possible to say that it was not written by the apostle John but by the presbyter John, John the elder, or some other John of the same age. Some of the critics seem ready to believe anything rather than allow that the belief in the apostle's authorship may be trustworthy.

XI. CLAIMS OF JOHN THE PRESBYTER

Who was John the elder or the presbyter? What reasons have we to think that such a man, as distinct from John the apostle, ever existed? There were three converg-

ing lines of evidence (?) for the apostle John's early martyrdom, and now we are told again that there are three converging lines of evidence for the existence of the presbyter John. 1. The Second Epistle of John and the Third Epistle of John are written by this man. Do they not begin with the salutations, "The elder unto the elect lady and her children,"¹⁰⁵ and "The elder unto Gaius the beloved"?¹⁰⁶ There must have been two religious leaders in Ephesus at this time and both were named John. One was John the apostle and the other was John the elder. This does not seem quite self-evident to us. Was not John the apostle very aged at this time and may he not have been called "the elder" for that reason? Or may he not have called himself an elder even as Peter did in his epistle when he wrote, "The elders therefore among you I exhort, who am a fellow elder."¹⁰⁷ John the apostle never calls himself by that title. Indeed, he uses the word "apostle" only once in the fourth Gospel. He has it three times in the Apocalypse. It does not seem to have been a favorite term with him any more than with Matthew and Mark, both of whom use the word only once. Luke has the title six times in his Gospel and some twenty-eight times in the book of Acts. John prefers the humble title "disciple" or the title which he can share with the other officials in the church, "elder." It is characteristic of his modesty to call himself by this name. We must have some better proof than this, therefore, before we come to any sure conclusion in this matter. When we ask for further proof it is forthcoming, and it turns out again to be a quotation from Papias.

2. Papias seems to have been a great comfort to many of the critics. The extant fragments of his writings are so few in number and the context in the case of each is so uncertain and the statements he makes are sometimes so

¹⁰⁵ 2 John 1.

¹⁰⁶ 3 John 1.

¹⁰⁷ 1 Pet. 5. 1.

ambiguous that great freedom in his interpretation becomes possible, and consequently we find the authorities quoting Papias in support of quite opposite views. In this case the authorities behind the quotation from Papias are much better than Georgius Hamartolus and Philip Sidetes, and we are ready to recognize the words quoted as surely belonging to Papias; but, what do they mean? Let us look at them and see for ourselves. Papias said, "If, then, anyone came, who had been a follower of the elders, I questioned him in regard to the words of the elders—what Andrew or what Peter said, or what was said by Philip, or by Thomas, or by James, or by John, or by Matthew, or by any other of the disciples of the Lord, and what things Aristion and the presbyter John, the disciples of the Lord, say."¹⁰⁸ Eusebius quotes this passage and then adds: "The name 'John' is twice enumerated by him. The first one he mentions in connection with Peter and James and Matthew and the rest of the apostles, clearly meaning the evangelist; but the other John he mentions after an interval, and places him among others outside of the number of the apostles, putting Aristion before him, and he distinctly calls him a presbyter. This shows that the statement of those is true who say that there were two persons in Asia that bore the same name."

This looks like a reasonable conclusion.¹⁰⁹ Why should Papias mention the apostle John twice in the same passage? However, we notice the following facts in connection with this passage: (1) If the elder John is to be distinguished from the apostle John in this passage, then Papias is the single authority for the existence of such a man. Papias appeals to him as of exceptional dignity, yet no other of the earliest church Fathers ever mentions him or seems to know anything at all about him. It appears improbable that

¹⁰⁸ Eusebius, Hist. Eccl. iii, 39.

¹⁰⁹ So Jerome, Erasmus, Grotius, Credner, Fritzsche, Bretschneider, Wieseler, Ebrard.

a distinguished teacher could have lived in Ephesus at this time and have left no other memorial behind him. (2) Irenæus read this statement made by Papias and understood him to refer to the apostle John in both occurrences of the name. As far as we know, this was the understanding of all the church Fathers up to the time of Eusebius. Irenæus believed that Papias was a hearer of the apostle John and of Polycarp his disciple; and he never seemed to suspect that Papias was citing any other authority than that of the evangelist.

(3) With these considerations in mind we turn to the passage in Papias again, and we conclude that Papias is not distinguishing between two persons at all, but simply between two methods of gathering his material, one by report of what John the apostle had said, and one by hearing the apostle himself. He tells us what Aristion and John *say*, and what others report that Peter and John and the rest of the apostles *said* before he, Papias, became a disciple.

(4) We notice that Papias explicitly calls Peter and Andrew and Philip and Thomas and James and John and Matthew "elders." They all belonged to the preceding generation, and Papias calls them all "elders." Therefore Papias himself becomes our authority for saying that John the apostle was John the elder as well. The other apostles had died, but John had lived on into his own day. Papias had a chance to hear John for himself.

Then, is not this all he intends to say in this ambiguous statement? "I had two sources of information, first, what John the elder was reported to me to have said, and, second, what I myself have heard John the elder say. I call John the apostle 'John the elder,' as I call Peter and Matthew and the other apostles 'elders'; for they were all disciples of the Lord, even as Aristion and John were who have survived to our day." This quotation from Papias, then, is far from establishing the existence of another John. It, rather, confirms us in our opinion that John the apostle

and John the elder are one and the same man. Have we any better proof than this that another John lived in Ephesus during the residence of the apostle there? There is no better proof, but we have one more authority to quote in favor of this supposition.

3. Dionysius of Alexandria is the only other authority previous to Eusebius who seems to have suspected that there might be more than one John among the Christian leaders of Ephesus. He says, "I am of the opinion that there were many of the same name as the apostle John, who, on account of their love for him, and because they admired and emulated him, and desired to be loved by the Lord as he was, took to themselves the same surname, as many of the children of the faithful are called Paul or Peter"; and later he adds, "They say that there are two monuments in Ephesus, each bearing the name of John."¹¹⁰ Concerning these statements we make the following observations. (1) Dionysius seems to be noting mere hearsay and conjecture. (2) Jerome says that some think that the two memorials at Ephesus are both in honor of John the evangelist.¹¹¹ Zahn tries to prove that these two memorials were churches, one on the site of the house where John had lived inside the walls of the city and one on the site of John's tomb outside the walls of the city, and he has succeeded in making this seem very probable.¹¹²

Here, then, is the sum total of the testimony to the existence of an elder John who was not the apostle. Dionysius lived a hundred and fifty years after John had been buried, and he hears that there are two memorials in Ephesus to John, and concludes, therefore, that there may have been two Johns. Eusebius lived nearly a century later still, and he finds a passage in Papias which mentions the name of John twice in one long and involved sentence,

¹¹⁰ Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.*, vii, 25.

¹¹¹ *De vir. ill.*, 9.

¹¹² *Acta Johannis*, p. cliv, sq.

and he concludes, therefore, that Papias must have meant two Johns. All later writers only repeat what these two Fathers have said.

We see at once what a nebulous character is this supposed additional John the elder. His very existence is open to question. Lightfoot, Westcott, and Huther are disposed to believe that there was such an individual, although they do not think that he wrote the fourth Gospel, but Farrar, Warfield, Salmon, and Plummer seriously doubt his existence. Keim relegates this "Doppelgänger" of the apostle to the land of ghosts. There was another mysterious John the presbyter or Prester John in the twelfth century. It is interesting and almost pathetic to see what an implicit faith many of the critics profess in the presbyter John and in his residence in Ephesus and in his authorship of the whole of the Johannine literature, while they maintain a most profound skepticism as to the possibility of any connection of the apostle John with these things. Forsaking the substance of the church tradition concerning these matters, they go chasing after a shadow. They seem to be capable of exercising more faith in a phantom than in a fact.

If this ghost of the presbyter John could be laid by learned argument, it would seem that the volume on John the Presbyter and the Fourth Gospel, published by John Chapman in 1911, might be sufficient to do it; but in all probability he will continue to flit through the imaginations of modern critics and over dubious theological battlefields for many a day to come. Delff, Dobschütz, Harnack, Schürer, Moffatt, McGiffert, and Bacon defend John the presbyter's authorship of the fourth Gospel; but we feel like saying of all of these what Sanday said in another connection of the last of them: "Bacon has been to Germany, and learned his lesson there too well. At least I find myself differing profoundly from his whole method of argument. The broad, simple arguments that seem to

me really of importance he puts aside, and then he spends his strength in making bricks with a minimum of straw, and even with no straw at all (the argument of silence)."¹¹³

XII. EVIDENCE FAVORABLE TO AUTHENTICITY

The question concerning the authorship of the Johannine literature is far from being a closed question as yet in the theological world, but the century of conflict has left us with some clear gains. In the first place, the date of the fourth Gospel can no longer be pushed far down into the second century or be far removed from the time of the residence of the apostle John in Ephesus. That would seem to be definitely settled now. In the second place, the century of unparalleled research in this field surely has warranted the conclusions which Harnack has expressed in the preface to his great work, *The Chronology of Ancient Christian Literature* down to the Time of Eusebius, when he says: "There was a time in which people felt obliged to regard the oldest Christian literature as a tissue of deceptions and falsifications. That time is past. For science it was an episode in which she learned much, and after which she has much to forget. . . . The oldest literature of the church is, in the main points, and in most of its details, from the point of view of literary history, veracious and trustworthy."

This certainly is a great gain. We would not push such an admission too far, but it surely is a comfort to Christians to know that the most thoroughgoing use of the historical method of investigation, pure science as such, is at last constrained to admit that the early Christian writers were not persistently and perpetually deceivers and liars, but on the whole their statements have approved themselves as veracious and trustworthy. We take off our hats to science and acknowledge the acknowledgment, while we

¹¹³ *The Criticism of the Fourth Gospel*, p. 24.

reflect within ourselves that we were assured of it all the time.

Too many writers in this field have approached the works of the church Fathers as if they were the productions of men of very suspicious character, banded together to mislead and deceive; and such writers seem to have proceeded upon the assumption that they were called to point out all apparent contradictions and possible misconceptions and in every way which human cleverness or diabolical ingenuity could devise they have attempted to cast discredit upon the statements made by the leaders and the saints in the church. It often was done in the name of science, but it has turned out to be pseudo-science at last. After a century of conflict the better, truer science has pronounced its verdict in favor of the general trustworthiness of the authorities in this field. With this spirit of confidence in both their ability and their sincerity we ask now what the church Fathers have told us about the authorship of the fourth Gospel.

We naturally begin with Irenæus, since Irenæus, Polycarp, and John himself furnish us with a threefold link of evidence which cannot be broken. Irenæus tells us how the four Gospels were written, and after mentioning the other three he adds, "Then John, the disciple of the Lord, who also had leaned upon his breast, did himself publish a Gospel during his residence at Ephesus in Asia."¹¹⁴ Could any testimony be more explicit than that? There can be no doubt that Irenæus intends to say that John the apostle lived in Ephesus and wrote the fourth Gospel there. Any one who denies these facts must disparage or disprove this testimony of Irenæus in order to do so. Is it "veracious and trustworthy"?

Irenæus was an Asiatic by birth, but he was bishop at Lyons in Gaul in A. D. 178. To that extent, therefore,

¹¹⁴ Adv. Haer., III, i, Ante-Nicene Fathers, vol. i, p. 414.

his testimony represents the church in the east and in the west. He was the successor of Pothinus, a man nearly ninety years of age, a man who was a growing youth when the apostle John died. His memory would go back to the apostle's own time. Would Irenæus hold any opinion as to the authorship of the fourth Gospel which Pothinus would not share? There is no slightest reason to think that there was any difference of thought at this point between them. However, there is a still closer link between Irenæus and the apostolic age. Irenæus was the pupil of Polycarp, who declared that he had been "eighty-six years in the Lord" at the time of his martyrdom, A. D. 155. Polycarp was a disciple of the apostle John, and he was a young man grown when the apostle John died. Irenæus was a young man grown when he was a disciple of Polycarp.

Writing to Florinus of those early days, he says: "I remember the events of that time more clearly than those of recent years. For what boys learn, growing with their mind, becomes joined with it; so that I am able to describe the very place in which the blessed Polycarp sat as he discoursed, and his goings out and his comings in, and the manner of his life, and his physical appearance, and his discourses to the people, and the accounts which he gave of his intercourse with John and with the others who had seen the Lord. . . . These things being told me by the mercy of God, I listened to them attentively, noting them down, not on paper, but in my heart. And continually, through God's grace, I recall them faithfully."¹¹⁵ Here is an old man's appeal to the clearness and the validity of his recollections of his youth, and that youth links him with one who was a youth of like age when he was a disciple of the aged apostle John at Ephesus.

The certainty of Irenæus rests upon the certainty of

¹¹⁶ Eusebius, Hist. Eccl., V. 20. Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, vol. i, pp. 238, 239.

Pothinus and of Polycarp, who were living at the time when the apostle John wrote the fourth Gospel. This testimony does not appear first as though resolving itself out of the blank mist at the close of the second century. It is no original creation of Irenæus and his age. It goes straight back through Polycarp to the apostle John himself. It represents the general opinion of the church in the east and in the west. It is the ancient, primitive, unbroken, and unquestioned tradition. It is this Irenæus tradition found in his extant works and of undoubted authenticity which Schmiedel and Moffatt and Bacon and the rest would set aside in favor of the "Papias-tradition," not extant in any of his writings to-day, and reported imperfectly by such unreliable authorities as Georgius Hamartolus and Philip Sidetes in the seventh or eighth or ninth century! That "Papias-tradition," so-called, is uncorroborated by any one of the church Fathers. The Irenæus tradition is confirmed on every hand.

Clement of Alexandria probably was born in Athens and was converted there. Having become a Christian, he traveled from teacher to teacher, and in this way he came under the instruction of an Italian, an Ionian, an Egyptian, a Syrian, an Assyrian, and a Hebrew, and in the various lands he became acquainted with the common tradition concerning the origin of the Gospels and the other New Testament books. He says of his teachers, "These men, preserving the true tradition directly from James, Peter, John, Paul, son receiving it from the father, came by God's providence even to us to deposit among us the seeds of truth which were derived from their ancestors and the apostles."¹¹⁶

From these sources, representing the east and the west and covering almost the entire compass of the Christian Church of that early age, Clement received his education in the Christian verities; and then at Alexandria he became

¹¹⁶ Strom, I, i. Ante-Nicene Fathers, vol. ii, p. 301.

associated with Pantænus, who was a contemporary of those who had known the apostles. He knew as well as any man could what the early church believed concerning these things. Having written down "the tradition of the earliest presbyters" concerning the other three Gospels he adds, "Last of all John, observing that the external facts had been made plain in the existing Gospels, being urged by his friends and inspired by the Spirit, composed a spiritual Gospel."¹¹⁷ From his Ionian teacher Clement learned the facts concerning the fourth Gospel as they were known at Ephesus where the Gospel was composed, and in traveling through the church he found no contrary tradition anywhere. All Christians had believed from the beginning that the apostle John had written the "spiritual Gospel."

Tertullian was the leader of the church in north Africa. Cardinal Newman called him "the most powerful writer of the early centuries."¹¹⁸ In his extant works he quotes from every chapter and in some chapters from almost every verse of the fourth Gospel. It is of apostolic and unquestioned authority with him. He says: "We assert, to begin with, that the evangelical instrument has for its authors apostles. . . . Of the apostles then, John and Matthew first plant faith in us."¹¹⁹ A little farther on in the same treatise he says: "The same authority of the apostolic churches will support the other Gospels which we have equally through them and according to their use. I mean the Gospels of John and Matthew."¹²⁰ The apostolic churches had had no other faith. They all believed in the apostle John's authorship of the fourth Gospel.

These men, Irenæus, Tertullian, and Clement of Alexandria, give us the testimony of the church in Asia Minor,

¹¹⁷ Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.*, VI, 14, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, vol. i, p. 201.

¹¹⁸ Tracts Theological and Ecclesiastical, p. 220.

¹¹⁹ Advers. Marc., IV, ii. Ante-Nicene Fathers, vol. iii, p. 347.

¹²⁰ Advers. Marc., IV, v. Ante-Nicene Fathers, vol. iii, p. 350.

Alexandria, Carthage, Rome, and Gaul. In their travels they had covered the entire territory occupied by Christendom in their day. For a quarter of a century Irenæus was a contemporary of Polycarp, who for a quarter of a century was a contemporary of the apostle John. Clement studied with elders who were contemporaries with the apostles. Tertullian was sure that he represented the tradition of the apostolic churches. All of them knew that their faith was that which the church had held from the very beginning. No other name ever was attached to the Gospel except that of the apostle John. It would have been impossible to impute it to him wrongly either while he lived or in these generations immediately after his death. Too many people knew the facts in the case. These facts were handed down from father to son until they reached the men we have quoted.

These men were leaders in the church. They were men of preeminent standing and ability. They were not critical in our modern sense of the word, but they were not credulous. They were careful in their inquiries, and they did not acknowledge apostolic authority without good reason. It seems almost impossible that the general tradition of the church represented by these authoritative names should go wrong as to such important facts as the long residence of John in Ephesus and his authorship of the fourth Gospel. The external evidence is favorable to these facts and, indeed, gives explicit testimony to them. Any attack made upon this testimony has proven to be either baseless or resting upon the most fragile foundations.

Therefore we are disposed to agree with Ritschl, who said that he believed the fourth Gospel to be authentic because the denial of its authenticity raised far greater difficulties than its acceptance,¹²¹ and with Ewald, who declared in his day that "every argument, from every quarter

¹²¹ Die Entstehung der altkatholischen Kirche, p. 48.

to which we can look, every trace and record, combine together to render any serious doubt upon the question absolutely impossible.”¹²² That represents our own conclusion, although it does not represent the conclusion of the persistent assailants of the authenticity of the fourth Gospel through the last one hundred years. However, we believe that the century and more of investigation has brought such a wealth of both external and internal evidence to light that Ebrard’s emphatic statement is well-nigh justified when he says that “with the exception of some of Paul’s epistles, no book can be found throughout the whole of the ancient literature, both Christian and profane, which can show such numerous and reliable proofs of its genuineness as the Gospel of John.”¹²³

The first known commentary on any New Testament book was a commentary on the fourth Gospel written by Heracleon, A. D. 145. Quotations from the Gospel are found in the writings of Melito, Apollinaris, and Theophilus in the same generation with Irenæus, Tertullian, and Clement of Alexandria, and in the Clementines and the writings of Tatian, Valentinus, and Justin Martyr of the generation preceding, and in the writings of Basilides, Polycarp, and Ignatius in the generation preceding that and immediately following the generation to which the apostle John belonged. The fourth Gospel did not steal into the church by the back door at the end of the second century. It came straight down from the end of the first century with apostolic authority behind it from the first. Eusebius is right in classing the fourth Gospel among the acknowledged books, of which there never was any question in the church.¹²⁴ In one of the most recent discussions of the subject James Iverach summarizes his conclusions by saying, “In truth the external evidence for the

¹²² Westcott, Introduction to the Gospels, p. x.

¹²³ Scientific Criticism of the Gospel History, p. 598.

¹²⁴ Hist. Eccles., III, 24, 2, 17.

early date and Johannine authorship of the fourth Gospel is as great both in extent and variety as it is for any book of the New Testament, and far greater than any that we possess for any work of classical antiquity.”¹²⁵

The internal evidence confirms the external evidence in a multitude of particulars. It would be easy to show, as it has been shown so many times, that the writer betrays an intimate acquaintance with the language, history, geography, customs, and beliefs of Palestine in the time of Jesus. He must have been a Jew, and a Palestinian Jew. Then, the narrative is so vivid and circumstantial that it makes the impression again and again that it must proceed from an eyewitness. It is written from the standpoint of the apostolic circle. There are numerous indications that the author is the apostle John, though his name never is mentioned.

If it be suggested that all of these things might have been put into the book by a clever forger, it surely is sufficient to say with Luthardt, “The fiction would be carried out far too artistically, and far too cunningly, to fit either the simplicity or the moral character of the book,”¹²⁶ or to conclude with Drummond: “I think that we may safely say that we know that the book was not written by any of the eminent men of the second century, whose names have been preserved; certainly none whose works have survived were capable of writing it. Is it, then, likely that there lived and died among them, entirely unknown, a man who throughout the century had absolutely no competitor in the wealth, originality, and depth of his genius, and this at a time when the struggling church required all her ablest men to come to the front? And if an author possessing this spiritual stature had issued his anonymous book, is it credible that he would have allowed it to be received and circulated as the work of the apostle, and thus have prac-

¹²⁵ International Standard Bible Encyclopædia, p. 1722.

¹²⁶ St. John, the Author of the Fourth Gospel, p. 186.

ticed an enormous deception on the church? I know that critics think that no stupidity is too foolish, no forgery too criminal, for an early Christian; but for my part I cannot believe in these moral monstrosities."¹²⁷

Sanday sums up the whole case when he says: "The Gospel of Saint John presents an unique phenomenon. It contains two distinct strata of thought, both quite unmistakable to the critical eye; and in each of these strata, again, there are local peculiarities which complicate the problem. When it comes to be closely investigated, the complexities of the problem are such that the whole of literature probably does not furnish a parallel. The hypothesis of authorship that shall satisfy them thus becomes in its turn equally complicated. It is necessary to find one who shall be at once Jew and Christian, intensely Jewish, and yet comprehensively Christian; brought up on the Old Testament, and yet with a strong tincture of Alexandrian philosophy; using a language in which the Hebrew structure and the Greek superstructure are equally conspicuous; one who had mixed personally in the events, and yet at the time of writing stood at a distance from them; an immediate disciple of Jesus, and yet possessed of so powerful an individuality as to impress the mark of himself upon his recollections; a nature capable of the most ardent and clinging affection, and yet an unsparing denouncer of hostile agencies of any kind which lay outside his own charmed circle. There is one historical figure which seems to fit like a key into all these intricate wards—the figure of Saint John, as it has been handed down to us by a well-authenticated tradition. I can conceive no second. If the Saint John of history did not exist, he would have to be invented to account for his Gospel."¹²⁸

At the close of the fourth Gospel we find this attestation: "This is the disciple that beareth witness of these things,

¹²⁷ The Character and Authorship of the Fourth Gospel, pp. 192, 193.

¹²⁸ The Study of the New Testament, p. 32.

and wrote these things; and we know that his witness is true.”¹²⁹ This may be the attestation of the church of Ephesus or of the officials of that church, and since it is to be found in all the manuscripts and versions of the Gospel, we know that it is of great antiquity. Now that we have seen how the internal evidence so completely agrees with the supposition of the apostle John’s authorship, and we have found that the authoritative tradition in the church is so continuous and so unanimous upon this point, and we remember how weak the attacks upon John’s residence in Ephesus and the attempted proofs that the presbyter John was a different individual from the apostle have proved to be, and we recall how every new discovery and the most exhaustive investigation of all the records have only served to substantiate the belief of the church from the beginning, we are ready in our turn, after the greatest and the longest conflict in the whole field of New Testament criticism, to set our seal to the truth of that ancient attestation, and to say for ourselves with all profundity of conviction: “This matter is now beyond any serious doubt. We are assured that the beloved disciple, the apostle John, bore his witness to the things recorded in the fourth Gospel, and wrote the book; and we are assured that his witness is true.”

XIII. OPPOSITION AND DEFENSE; CONCLUSION

The criticism of Strauss was carried to its logical absurdity by Bruno Bauer.¹³⁰ Then the greater master Ferdinand Christian Baur¹³¹ founded the Tübingen School and he and his disciples made most determined assaults upon the authenticity of the fourth Gospel. Zeller,¹³² Köstlin,¹³³

¹²⁹ John 21. 24.

¹³⁰ *Kritik der evangelischen Geschichte des Johannis*, 1840.

¹³¹ *Kritische Untersuchungen über die kanonischen Evangelien*, 1847.

Die Tübinger Schule, 1860.

¹³² Die äusseren Zeugnisse über das Dasein und der Ursprung des vierten Evangeliums, 1845.

¹³³ Der Lehrbegriff des Evangeliums und der Briefe Johannis, 1843.

Schwegler,¹³⁴ Scholten,¹³⁵ Schenkel,¹³⁶ Scherer,¹³⁷ Hilgenfeld,¹³⁸ Volkmar,¹³⁹ Weizsäcker,¹⁴⁰ Thoma,¹⁴¹ Taylor,¹⁴² Schweitzer,¹⁴³ Renan,¹⁴⁴ and Samuel Davidson,¹⁴⁵ continued the attack begun by Baur; but even Bacon now declares that "Baur's theory of the origin of the Johannine writings is as obsolete as the Ptolemaic geography."¹⁴⁶ Driven from one position to another, the line of attack has changed as the need of the day required, but the conflict never has ended and new theories now are being advanced which in turn we believe are doomed in the light of the advancing truth to become as obsolete as their predecessors.

Among the more modern opponents of the Johannine authorship we may mention H. J. Holtzmann,¹⁴⁷ Otto Holtzmann,¹⁴⁸ Delff,¹⁴⁹ Schmiedel,¹⁵⁰ Wrede,¹⁵¹ Wernle,¹⁵²

¹³⁴ Das nachapostolische Zeitalter in den Hauptmomenten seiner Entwicklung, 1846.

¹³⁵ Het Evangelie naar Johannes, 1865.

¹³⁶ Das Charakterbild Jesu, 1864.

¹³⁷ Les Procédés de la Critique Interne, 1855.

¹³⁸ Das Evangelium und die Briefe Johannis nach ihrem Lehrbegriff, 1849. Die Evangelien, nach ihrer Entstehung und geschichtlichen Bedeutung, 1854.

¹³⁹ Die Religion Jesu, 1857.

¹⁴⁰ Untersuchungen über die evangelische Geschichte, 1864.

¹⁴¹ Die Genesis des Johannes-Evangeliums, 1882.

¹⁴² An Attempt to Ascertain the Character of the Fourth Gospel, 1867.

¹⁴³ Das Evangelium Johannes, 1841.

¹⁴⁴ Vie de Jesus, 1867.

¹⁴⁵ Introduction to the New Testament, 1868.

¹⁴⁶ The Fourth Gospel in Research and Debate, p. 20.

¹⁴⁷ Einleitung in das Neue Testament, 1885.

¹⁴⁸ Das Johannes-Evangelium, 1887.

¹⁴⁹ Das vierte Evangelium wiederhergestellt, 1890.

¹⁵⁰ The Johannine Writings, 1908.

¹⁵¹ Charakter und Tendenz des Johannes-Evangeliums, 1903.

¹⁵² The Beginnings of Christianity, 1903.

Harnack,¹⁵³ Jülicher,¹⁵⁴ Réville,¹⁵⁵ Loisy,¹⁵⁶ Dob-schütz,¹⁵⁷ Brückner,¹⁵⁸ Kreyenbühl,¹⁵⁹ Pfleiderer,¹⁶⁰ E. A. Abbott,¹⁶¹ Moffatt,¹⁶² McGiffert,¹⁶³ Bacon,¹⁶⁴ Cone,¹⁶⁵ Gardner,¹⁶⁶ Grill,¹⁶⁷ and E. F. Scott.¹⁶⁸ Everything written in opposition has been fully answered by the defenders of the authenticity of the fourth Gospel and an illustrious line of authorities stretches over the whole period of the century and more since Evanson made his first assault and to them belongs the credit of maintaining intact the citadel of tradition which in this case as in so many others has proved to be the citadel of the impregnable truth. In the Old Testament the greatest battle in the field of the higher criticism has been decided against the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch. In the New Testament the greatest battle in the field of literary criticism has not been decided against the Johannine authorship of the fourth Gospel. There are as able defenders of the authenticity of the fourth Gospel to-day as at any time in the past century and the many victories which have been won in the century and the evident weaknesses in the present-day assaults give promise that the defense soon will be in complete possession of the field.

¹⁵³ Chronologie der altchristlichen Litteratur, 1904.

¹⁵⁴ Einleitung in das Neue Testament, 1894.

¹⁵⁵ Le quatrième evangile, son origine et sa valeur, 1901.

¹⁵⁶ Autour d'un petit livre, 1903.

¹⁵⁷ Probleme des apostolischen Zeitalters, 1904.

¹⁵⁸ Die vier Evangelien, 1887.

¹⁵⁹ Das Evangelium der Wahrheit, 1905.

¹⁶⁰ Urchristentum, 1902.

¹⁶¹ Encyclopedia Biblica, 1761f.

¹⁶² Introduction, 1911.

¹⁶³ The Apostolic Age, 1906.

¹⁶⁴ The Fourth Gospel, 1910.

¹⁶⁵ The Gospel and its Earliest Interpreters, 1893.

¹⁶⁶ The Ephesian Gospel, 1915.

¹⁶⁷ Untersuchungen über die Entstehung des vierten Evangeliums, 1902.

¹⁶⁸ The Fourth Gospel, 1906.

Among those who have rendered valiant service to the cause in the whole period of the discussion we may give honorable mention to Schleiermacher,¹⁶⁹ De Wette,¹⁷⁰ Neander,¹⁷¹ Lücke,¹⁷² Bertholdt,¹⁷³ Bleek,¹⁷⁴ Ebrard,¹⁷⁵ Ewald,¹⁷⁶ Lange,¹⁷⁷ Tholuck,¹⁷⁸ Mayer,¹⁷⁹ Hengstenberg,¹⁸⁰ Hase,¹⁸¹ Ritschl,¹⁸² Beyschlag,¹⁸³ Luthardt,¹⁸⁴ Weiss,¹⁸⁵ Zahn,¹⁸⁶ Godet,¹⁸⁷ Pressensé,¹⁸⁸ Ezra Abbot,¹⁸⁹ Lightfoot,¹⁹⁰ Liddon,¹⁹¹ Leathes,¹⁹² Evans,¹⁹³ Macdonald,¹⁹⁴ Norton,¹⁹⁵ Gloag,¹⁹⁶ Fisher,¹⁹⁷ Orr,¹⁹⁸ Drum-

¹⁶⁹ Einleitung ins Neue Testament, 1845.

¹⁷⁰ Lehrbuch der historisch-kritischen Einleitung, 1826.

¹⁷¹ Das Leben Jesu Christi, 1837.

¹⁷² Commentar über die Schriften des Evangelisten Johannes, 1840.

¹⁷³ Verisimilia de origine Evangelii Johannis, 1805.

¹⁷⁴ Einleitung in das Neue Testament, 1860.

¹⁷⁵ Das Evangelium Johannis, 1845.

¹⁷⁶ Die Johanneischen Schriften, 1862.

¹⁷⁷ Das Evangelium nach Johannes, 1860.

¹⁷⁸ Commentar zum Evangelium Johannis, 1857.

¹⁷⁹ Die Echtheit des Evangeliums nach Johannes, 1854.

¹⁸⁰ Das Evangelium des heiligen Johannes, 1863.

¹⁸¹ Vom Evangelium des Johannis, 1866.

¹⁸² Die Entstehung der altkatholischen Kirche, 1857.

¹⁸³ Zur Johanneischen Frage, 1875.

¹⁸⁴ St. John, the Author of the Fourth Gospel, 1875.

¹⁸⁵ Manual of Introduction to the New Testament, 1886.

¹⁸⁶ Introduction to the New Testament, 1909.

¹⁸⁷ Commentary on the Gospel of John, 1886.

¹⁸⁸ Jésus Christ, 1866.

¹⁸⁹ The Authorship of the Fourth Gospel, 1880.

¹⁹⁰ Biblical Essays, 1893.

¹⁹¹ The Divinity of Our Lord, 1884.

¹⁹² The Witness of St. John to Christ, 1870.

¹⁹³ St. John, the Author of the Fourth Gospel, 1888.

¹⁹⁴ Life and Writings of St. John, 1880.

¹⁹⁵ Evidences of the Genuineness of the Gospel, 1848.

¹⁹⁶ Introduction to the Johannine Writings, 1891.

¹⁹⁷ Grounds of Theistic and Christian Belief, 1902.

¹⁹⁸ The Authenticity of John's Gospel, 1870.

mond,¹⁹⁹ Watkins,²⁰⁰ Westcott,²⁰¹ Scott-Moncrief,²⁰² Sanday,²⁰³ Strachan,²⁰⁴ Strong,²⁰⁵ Stanton,²⁰⁶ Dods,²⁰⁷ and Davison.²⁰⁸ The scholarship has not been on one side only in this struggle. The scholarship of these defenders of the authenticity of the fourth Gospel has been equal or superior to that of their foes. It was of a saner quality and rested upon firmer and surer foundations, as the past century has shown. It is not likely that any discovery in the future will radically change the situation of to-day, as far as this question is concerned. The triumph of the truth through a hundred years will be maintained in the days to come. In reading the fourth Gospel we shall rest assured that we are coming into touch with that disciple whom Jesus loved most and who had the clearest insight into the Master's mission and message and mind.

For a long, long time John had been a disciple of Jesus. It probably was more than sixty years since he had left his fisher's nets to follow the Lord. It was a long, long way he had come from Galilee to Ephesus in Asia Minor. He had labored to do his Master's will and to maintain his Master's spirit in the church which honored the Master's name. He had preached the gospel truth to two generations. Now he would write it down for all the generations to come. The fourth Gospel was to be the Gospel for all eternity.

¹⁹⁹ The Character and Authorship of the Fourth Gospel, 1903.

²⁰⁰ Modern Criticism considered in its relation to the Fourth Gospel, 1890.

²⁰¹ Commentary on St. John's Gospel, 1899.

²⁰² St. John, Apostle, Evangelist, and Prophet, 1909.

²⁰³ The Criticism of the Fourth Gospel, 1905.

²⁰⁴ Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels, 1906.

²⁰⁵ Hastings's Dictionary of the Bible, 1899.

²⁰⁶ Gospels as Historical Documents, 1903.

²⁰⁷ Expositor's Greek Testament, vol. i, 1897.

²⁰⁸ Hastings's single volume Dictionary of the Bible, 1909.

PART III
THE FIRST EPISTLE OF JOHN

PART III

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I. WHAT SHALL WE CALL IT?

What is the First Epistle of John? Is it an epistle? Is it a letter? Is it something else? Deissmann in his Bible Studies has written a long discussion of the distinction between a letter and an epistle;¹ and when he comes to apply his principles to the New Testament literature he has no trouble in deciding that the letters of Paul are true letters, and that the Epistle to the Hebrews, the First Epistle of Peter, and the Epistle of James are epistles; but he is uncertain about the classification of First John, and he gives up altogether when he comes to Second and Third John. He cannot decide whether these are letters or epistles. Of First John he says, "It is a brochure, the literary *eidos* of which cannot be determined just at once."² He thinks that, strictly speaking, it cannot be called an epistle, and he seems disposed to class it among the letters of the New Testament, but he never states any clear conclusion concerning it.

The ancient letters always began with a stereotyped form, just as our modern letters do. We begin with the date and the name of the person addressed, and we sign our name at the close. The ancient letter reversed this practice and began with the writer's name, followed by the name of the person or persons addressed and then by a formal greeting. There is nothing of this sort in First John. John's name does not appear anywhere in the

¹ Pp. 3-59.

² P. 50.

writing from beginning to end. No proper names appear in it, either of the writer or of the persons addressed. There is no formal greeting and no formal close. It begins as abruptly as the fourth Gospel did and in language which at once recalls the Logos theology of that Prologue. Like a clap of thunder out of a clear sky the introduction to this little writing hurls the truth at us with the vehement affirmation of a Boanerges of the faith. If it is not an epistle and if it has not the usual form of a letter, what is it? Heidegger called it "a manual of doctrine."³ Reuss⁴ and Westcott⁵ call it "a homiletical essay, a Pastoral." Michaelis⁶ and others call it a treatise. It evidently is difficult to name it.

John does what others do, but he always does it differently. Others had written Gospels, and John wrote a Gospel; and it was so different from the other Gospels as to seem like another order of literary creation. It was a biography as the others had been, but it was a biography of the spirit more than of the external life. It was a history, but it was not the history of certain happenings so much as it was the history of a heart. Others had written letters and epistles, and John writes one too, but it is so different from all which had preceded it that we scarcely know whether it belongs in the same category with them. As Farrar has said: "There is in it nothing of the passionate personal element of Paul's letters; none of the burning controversy, of the subtle dialectics, of the elaborate doctrine, of the intense appeal. Nor has it anything of the stately eloquence and sustained allegorizing of the Epistle to the Hebrews; nor does it enunciate the stern rules of practical ethics like James; nor, again, does it throb with that storm of moral indignation which sweeps through the

³ Enchir. Bibl., p. 986.

⁴ Geschichte der heil. Schriften, N. T., p. 226.

⁵ The Epistles of St. John, p. 30.

⁶ Works, vol. i, p. 113.

Epistles of Peter and Jude. Its tone and manner are wholly different."⁷

Most of the letters of Paul were occasioned by certain definite events. There is no suggestion of any particular occasion for the writing of First John. It might have been written at almost any time and in almost any place and under almost any conditions. Its contents are suitable for all times and places and conditions of men. Yet Bishop Alexander was undoubtedly right when he said: "It is a mistake to look upon the First Epistle of John as a creedless composite of miscellaneous sweetneses, a disconnected rhapsody upon philanthropy. And it will be well to enter upon a serious perusal of it with a conviction that it did not drop from the sky upon an unknown place, at an unknown time, with an unknown purpose."⁸ When we look into the letter we find that the writer of it is addressing somebody very definitely and directly. He speaks to them as "you" thirty-six times. He says "I write" or "I wrote" thirteen times. He calls them "my little children" six times. He calls them "beloved" six times.⁹ He evidently recognizes a personal relation existing between himself and his readers. He has an apostolic, prophetic, and paternal interest in them. He knows the little children, the young men, and the fathers among them, and he has a word of counsel for each and all. He knows that there have been apostates from their company and that false doctrines have been preached to them.¹⁰ He seems to prefer the abstract presentation of thought, but as he enunciates his general principles he evidently has some definite persons in mind who are to apply these principles to definite historical conditions.

⁷ Messages of the Books, p. 479.

⁸ Expositor's Bible, Commentary on the Epistles of John, p. 5.

⁹ γηράφω, ἔγηραψα; τεκνία, παιδία; ἀγαπητοί. Compare Farrar, *op. cit.*, p. 474.

¹⁰ I John 2. 12-14, 19, 26.

What, then, shall we conclude as to the nature of this book? 1. We will call it a letter, with Düsterdieck, De Wette, Huther, Ebrard, Haupt, Bleek, Weiss, Luthardt, Westcott, Salmond, and others. Düsterdieck said, "The whole writing rests so thoroughly on a living personal relation between the author and his readers, the application of the written exhortation is so absolutely personal, that this ground is enough to make us consider the writing as a genuine letter."¹¹ Weiss says, "The work is a letter, not a treatise; the discussion has not the form of dialectic development but of thoughtful meditation on certain great fundamental truths."¹² 2. While we call it a letter, we acknowledge that it is very different from most ancient letters and all of the letters of the New Testament. Farrar agrees: "The unconstrained style, the informal transitions, the mingled exhortations all show that it is a letter. At the same time it is the most abstract and impersonal, the most independent of place and time and circumstance, of all the writings in the New Testament."¹³

3. The letter is not written to those at a distance, but, rather, to those who were living in the writer's own diocese. It was Bengel who with his usual insight said that John seems to be among those to whom he is writing, and that seems to us to fit the facts of the case. In his old age John was the recognized chief authority in the church. He was the bishop resident in Asia Minor. He was so old that all in the church, fathers and sons alike, seemed to him to be little children. To them all he wrote these words of instruction and advice. They were the final formulation of his faith. They were his seal set upon the testimony of his life teaching. They summarized all he had said. These younger generations might read these words and recall his voice as they had heard him utter them. They might

¹¹ Quoted in *The Books of the Bible*, p. 303.

¹² *Introduction to the New Testament*, vol. ii, p. 183.

¹³ *Op. cit.*, p. 474.

read these words and know the highest reach of apostolic revelation. This little book would be the last will and testament of the last of the apostles to the Christian Church. It would go along with his Gospel as the church's most precious heritage. It would appeal to the Christians of all generations as directly and as intimately as to those of John's own day.

II. RELATION TO THE FOURTH GOSPEL

What is the relation of the First Epistle to the fourth Gospel?

A. In attempting to answer that question we call attention to the following resemblances. 1. The two writings are alike in their literary style. (1) We have seen what a fondness John had in the fourth Gospel for the repetition of the number three in the arrangement of his material. The same thing is true of this epistle. Most of the commentators decide that all of its contents center about the three propositions, God is light, God is righteousness, God is love. If we agree to this as the general outline, it would be equally easy to show that the same triple arrangement of thought ruled in the subdivisions, and even in the single paragraphs of the epistle.

(2) We have the same meagerness of connecting particles which we found characteristic of the fourth Gospel. For the most part the sentences are connected by "and" alone. "And if any man sin, we have an Advocate. And he is the propitiation. And in this we know. And this is the message. And this is the commandment. And this is the witness."¹⁴ (3) We find that the same noun is repeated, instead of being replaced by the pronoun referring to it in the epistle, as in the fourth Gospel. "In the beginning was the Logos, and the Logos was with God, and the Logos was God." We would have said, "He was with

¹⁴ 1 John 1. 5; 2. 1-3; 3. 23; 5. 11.

God and he was God." In the epistle we read, "He that hateth his brother is in the darkness, and walketh in the darkness, . . . because the darkness hath blinded his eyes."¹⁵ We would have said, "It hath blinded his eyes." "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world," John says.¹⁶ We would have said, "Neither the things that are in it."

(4) Sometimes this repetition of the same word extends through an entire paragraph and becomes the chain linking the whole together. We find this in the Gospel.¹⁷ We see it again in the epistle, "Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is begotten of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love. Herein was the love of God manifested in us, that God hath sent his only-begotten Son into the world that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son *to be* the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No man hath beheld God at any time: if we love one another, God abideth in us, and his love is perfected in us."¹⁸ See how the changes are rung upon the word "love." No lovelorn swain of the sentimental romance could be more monotonous in his insistence upon the dominant character of his love. It is the divine and eternal and spiritual love of which John writes, but he is just as fervid in his avowal of its necessity and its supremacy as any victim of an earthly passion could be.

In the fifth chapter of the epistle we have the same recurrence of the word "witness" which we found in the fifth chapter of the fourth Gospel, "And it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is the truth. For there are three who bear witness, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood: and the three agree in one. If we receive

¹⁵ I John 2. 11.

¹⁶ I John 2. 15.

¹⁷ John 5. 31-39.

¹⁸ I John 4. 7-12.

the witness of men, the witness of God is greater: for the witness of God is this, that he hath borne witness concerning his Son. He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in him: he that believeth not God hath made him a liar; because he hath not believed in the witness that God hath borne concerning his Son. And the witness is this, that God gave unto us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.”¹⁹

(5) We find the same preference for the abstract in the epistle and in the Gospel, as in the phrases, “to be of God, to abide in love, to have life, to do sin, to do lawlessness, to do righteousness, to do the truth.” To John’s mind the truth was not only to be spoken, but to be done. It was to be lived. It was to be exemplified in daily conduct. It was to be realized in action. The general expression, “to do the truth,” stood for any number of individual concrete illustrations. The single fact never is of so much interest to John as a general truth. (6) We find the same limited vocabulary in both Gospel and epistle, the same favorite words of broadest content and capable of the most varied meaning. Life, light, love, darkness, death, world, fellowship, truth—these are the words which John uses again and again, presenting them from different points of view, “as if a man allowed a diamond to play in ever-different light,” Luthardt once said. They are John’s jewels, and he treasures them at their true worth. It has been estimated that there are two hundred and ninety-five different words in the epistle and that of these only sixty-nine are not to be found also in the Gospel.

(7) We find the same sharp contrasts in both books. Here in the epistle we have arrayed over against each other in irreconcilable antagonism, death and life, darkness and light, confidence and fear, righteousness and unrighteousness, Christ and antichrist, love of God and love of the

¹⁹ I John 5. 7-11.

world, believers and the world, the children of God and the children of the devil. (8) In the fourth Gospel we read, "He that believeth on the Son hath eternal life; but he that obeyeth not the Son shall not see life."²⁰ In the epistle we find the same custom of stating things positively and then negatively, as follows, "God is light, and in him is no darkness at all," "We lie, and do not the truth," "We deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us," "He . . . is a liar, and the truth is not in him," "His anointing . . . is true, and is no lie," and, paralleling the passage we quoted from the Gospel, "He that hath the Son hath the life; he that hath not the Son of God hath not the life."²¹ (9) The two writings have the same profundity of thought and simplicity of language combined in a style which is unparalleled and inimitable. In minor details and in general characteristics the style of these two books is peculiar.

Church tradition has found only one hand to which to ascribe them. If John did not write them, the greatest genius of the apostolic age is without a name in church history, while scores of lesser literary lights are well known. If John wrote them, the greatest philosopher and theologian and saint and seer of the apostolic company has left us in them a monument worthy of himself and his Master; for there are no two books in the New Testament which we would exchange for these.

2. The doctrines they present are fundamentally the same. (1) The Logos doctrine of the two Prologues is identical and has no parallel in any other New Testament books. (2) Christ is called a Paraclete in these two books alone. The Holy Spirit is another Paraclete.²² (3) Jesus is called the Only Begotten Son in these two books alone.²³ (4) According to these two books, eternal life begins on

²⁰ John 3. 36.

²¹ 1 John 1. 5, 6, 8; 2. 4, 27; 5. 12.

²² John 14. 16; 1 John 2. 1.

²³ John 1. 18; 3. 16, 18; 1 John 4. 9.

earth and goes on without interruption into heaven. Eternal life is the present possession of the Christian believer. The phrase "eternal life" is found only once in the Old Testament—Dan. 12. 2. It occurs forty-four times in the New Testament and more than half of these occurrences are found in these two books. The word "heaven" and the word "glory" are not found in this First Epistle, probably because the words "eternal life" represented to John all that the other words implied. To John, "the road to heaven lies through heaven, and all the way to heaven is heaven."

(5) In both books John draws the line of cleavage between believers and unbelievers, as the children of God and the children of the devil. They are both manifest to themselves by the Spirit's presence or by the lack of it and to others by righteousness of daily life or by the lack of it. There are the two armies, and only two. There are two leaders, and only two. They forever are opposed to each other. There is no neutral ground. There is no compromise possible. The feud is internecine. No man ever can flee from the responsibilities the warfare puts upon him. We are all of us conscripts in this spiritual war. There is no possibility of the purchase of a substitute. We are drafted and must fight on the field. We may take the standard we choose. We may follow the leader we prefer. We may determine to what host we belong. But whether we will or will not, the choice of service is imperative and inevitable. To-day we are enrolled, in the books of record kept with an accuracy divine. To-day it is decided that to this army or to that our influence is given. That is the conception of a Boanerges, to whom all compromise is contemptible cowardice and who would have all men to be as out-and-out as himself.

3. The same personal characteristics of the author are apparent in these two books. (1) The author's name does not appear in either book. He hides himself in all modesty

while he claims to be an eyewitness and to proclaim the absolute truth. (2) He is a Boanerges in the decisiveness and the bitterness of his assault upon all depravers of the truth and all who indulge in Satanic sin. He calls a lie a lie, and he never allows that darkness is light or twilight. It is always black to him. The people who come around with new doctrines, denying the reality of the incarnation, are not interesting or tolerable to John. They are liars and antichrists and children of the devil. He is the Apostle of Love, but he does not love laxity. He loves only that which is lovely, and he hates with a white-hot hatred everything which tends to mar and destroy the loveliness of the pure and the good.

(3) He is absolutely sure of the truth. He knows what he is talking about. He knows that he is dealing with primary principles and that there are no exceptions. He has been taught by intuition and confirmed in his convictions by long experience. He has the assurance of one who has grasped realities and tested the certainties until there is no more room for doubt in his heart. Doubt is one of the impossibilities. "We are reminded of a fine stroke of Bunyan, in his allegory of The Holy War, when he names Captain Experience among the chief officers who routed and slew the army of ten thousand Doubters that came against the city of Mansoul. There is nothing so impervious to doubts as a sound personal experience of Christ's saving power and love."²⁴ From this stronghold of personal experience John spoke. He knew; and he was contented with stating the fact.

4. The method of dealing with error and of presenting the truth is the same in the two books. As Bishop McDowell has said: "John does not argue against people living in the dark. He simply floods the world with light, and a heretic must hunt a hole if he wants darkness."²⁵

²⁴ Donald Fraser, *Lectures on the Bible*, vol. ii, p. 289.

²⁵ Iliff School Studies, p. 72.

The similarity of style, the identity of doctrine, the like personal characteristics, and the same method of expression would seem to settle the question as to single authorship.

5. When we add to these marks of identification the fact that there are at least thirty-five passages in which the thought is closely parallel in the two books, and that in some of these cases the same words and phrases are used, we must conclude either that one man wrote both books or that the writer of the epistle was a wholesale and unconscionable plagiarist.²⁸ The beginning verses have the same ideas, and the two books close with the same thought. Almost all the critics therefore, whether they believe the apostle John or some one else wrote these books, agree in the conclusion that the same hand is responsible for both the Gospel and the epistle.

Westcott declares, "The epistle is so closely connected with the fourth Gospel in vocabulary, style, thought, and scope, that these two books cannot but be regarded as works of the same author." Law, in his volume called *The Tests of Life*, which is a very able commentary on the First Epistle, concludes: "*Prima facie*, the case for identity of authorship is overwhelmingly strong. On internal grounds, it would appear much more feasible to assign any two of Shakespeare's plays to different authors, than the Gospel and the First Epistle of John. They are equally saturated with that spiritual and theological atmosphere, they are equally characterized by that type of thought, which we call Johannine, and which presents an interpretation of Christianity not less original and distinctive than Paulinism. . . . In short, it seems impossible to conceive of two independent literary productions having a more intimate affinity. The relation between them is, in

²⁸ Compare John 1. 1-4 with 1 John 1. 1-4, and John 1. 18 with 1 John 4. 12, and John 3. 36 with 1 John 5. 12, and John 20. 31 with 1 John 5. 13.

every way, closer than that between the third Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles, where the identity of authorship is now generally admitted, the only case of approximation to it being that of the Epistles to the Ephesians and the Colossians"²⁷ For these conclusions the evidence is furnished in detail, and Law's whole chapter on the "Relation of the Epistle to the Fourth Gospel" is worth careful study. Baur, Pfleiderer, H. J. Holtzmann, Von Soden, and others held that there was a different authorship here, but even such radical critics as Jülicher, Wernle, and Wrede have been convinced that dual authorship is impossible.

B. Having noticed their likeness to each other, it may be well for us to point out some differences between the two books.

1. We have seen that they begin with the same ideas. The form in which these ideas are presented in the Gospel is in striking contrast with that in the epistle. The Gospel begins with a series of short sentences, each easily understood and complete in itself. The epistle begins with one long and involved sentence with a broken and rather difficult grammatical construction. A parenthesis cuts across the course of the thought, which is caught up again toward the close. An old divine says that the epistle is "prefaced and brought in with more magnificent ceremony than any passage in Scripture."²⁸ There is only one passage like it in all of John's other writing, the first verses of the thirteenth chapter in the Gospel.
2. There is not a single quotation from the Old Testament in the epistle. The Gospel has many of them. There are references to Old Testament characters in both.
3. As we might naturally expect, the epistle has much less of historical background and of local coloring than the Gospel. The difference in the character of the two writings would account for this.
4. Westcott says that their themes are different.

²⁷ Law, *The Tests of Life*, pp. 340, 341.

²⁸ Alexander, *op. cit.*, p. 80.

"The theme of the Gospel is, Jesus is Christ; the theme of the epistle is, Christ is Jesus."²⁹ Law draws this further distinction between them, "The Gospel is christocentric; the epistle, theocentric. In the one is given the concrete presentment of the incarnate Son; in the other the immediate intuition of the divine nature revealed in him. While the theme common to both is the 'Word of life,' the special theme of the Gospel is the Word who reveals and imparts the life; in the epistle it is the life revealed and imparted by the Word, and the thought of the indwelling Christ is naturally carried up to the ultimate truth of the indwelling God."³⁰

C. We have not yet decided what relation these two writings were intended to bear to each other. Lightfoot thought that the epistle was planned to serve as an introduction to the Gospel. Hilgenfeld said it was the pattern upon which the Gospel afterward was built. Bleek, Huther, Pfleiderer, Zeller thought that the epistle was written first. Others, like Bretschneider, Ebrard,³¹ Hug,³² Hausrath, Hofmann, Haupt,³³ and Thiersch, have agreed that the epistle was a dedicatory writing intended to accompany the Gospel wherever it went. Baur said the epistle was simply a poor copy from the Gospel. Augusti and Holtzmann called it a summary or practical setting of the contents of the Gospel. Others, like Michaelis, Storr, and Eichhorn, are content to name the epistle a companion of the Gospel or a second part of the Gospel. Lücke, De Wette, Reuss, Schenkel are sure of the priority of the Gospel. Westcott says, "The substance of the Gospel is a commentary on the epistle; the epistle is (so to speak)

²⁹ Commentary on John, p. lxxxviii.

³⁰ International Standard Bible Encyclopædia, p. 1703.

³¹ "A companion-document." Commentary on John's Epistles, p. 25.

³² "A supplement," Introduction to New Testament, vol. ii, p. 249.

³³ "A postscript," On the First Epistle of John, p. 374.

the condensed moral and practical application of the Gospel."³⁴

We are inclined to believe that the epistle was written later than the Gospel and was designed to be a sort of appendix to it. We agree with Bishop Alexander that "The epistle is to be read through with constant reference to the Gospel. There is a vital and constant connection. The two documents not only touch each other in thought, but interpenetrate each other; and the epistle is constantly suggesting questions which the Gospel only can answer."³⁵ "The epistle is intelligible," says Haupt, "only if we suppose the reader to possess a knowledge of the Gospel, not only in general, but also in detailed expressions."³⁶ This seems to us to be true of 1 John 1. 1-4; 2. 7; 4. 17; and 5. 6-8. In any case, whether the epistle is a preface to the Gospel or, as we suppose, an appendix to it, these two books stand together. They belong to the same family. They are of one blood. Professor Ramsay says, "No two works in the whole range of literature show clearer signs of the genius of one writer, and no other pair of works are so completely in a class by themselves, apart from the work of their own and every other time."³⁷

III. GENUINENESS AND DATE

The external evidence for the genuineness of the epistle is very satisfactory. Polycarp³⁸ and Papias³⁹ quote from it. The Muratorian Fragment bears its testimony to the authorship of the apostle John. The Peshito and the Itala recognized it. Tertullian,⁴⁰ Clement of Alexandria,⁴¹

³⁴ The Epistles of John, p. xxx.

³⁵ *Op. cit.*, p. 75.

³⁶ The First Epistle of John, p. 373.

³⁷ The Church in the Roman Empire, p. 303.

³⁸ Ad Phil., vii.

³⁹ Eusebius, Hist. Eccl., v, 20.

⁴⁰ Adv. Prax., xv.

⁴¹ Strom., II, 15. Paedag., III, 11.

Irenæus,⁴² Origen,⁴³ Cyprian,⁴⁴ and others among the church Fathers use it and witness to its composition by John. Even Dr. Samuel Davidson admits that "the letter is well attested by the voice of antiquity, and that, as far as external evidence reaches, its authenticity seems to be secure,"⁴⁵ and Lücke asserts, "Incontestably, our epistle must be numbered among those canonical books which are most strongly upheld by ecclesiastical tradition."⁴⁶ We already have seen that the internal evidence is equally good. Upon the basis of both we conclude that the First Epistle was written by the apostle John at Ephesus or in its near neighborhood some time during the last decades of the first century.

IV. HERESIES COMBATED

Are any particular heresies aimed at in this epistle? Baur said that the author of the epistle wrote against the Montanists, and Hilgenfeld thought that he aimed at the Gnosticism of the second century; but if the apostle John was the author, neither of these suppositions would be possible. We must look for heresies which were prevalent in his time. *Oriental dualism* undoubtedly was taught in Ephesus in his day. It regarded evil as an eternal attribute of matter. This philosophical doctrine naturally led to *theological Docetism*. Jerome says, "When the blood of Christ was but lately shed and the apostles were still in Judæa, the Lord's body was asserted to be a phantom."⁴⁷

If the flesh was material and evil was inherent in all matter, then a genuine incarnation became impossible. The Divine could not inhabit a vile body. It would be better

⁴² Adv. Haer., III, 16. 5.

⁴³ De orat., Opp. I, p. 233.

⁴⁴ Epis. 24.

⁴⁵ Introduction to the New Testament, vol. ii, p. 302.

⁴⁶ The Epistles of John, p. 7.

⁴⁷ Adv. Lucifer, xxiii. Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, vol. vi, p. 332.

to say that the body of Jesus was an illusion than to say it was real. Then the sufferings of Jesus were only apparent and there was no reality about them. It was a comparatively easy thing, therefore, for God to save men. Salvation was without suffering or sacrifice on his part, and it was only natural that it should be concluded that it might also be without much suffering or sacrifice on the part of man. A docetic Christ led inevitably to a docetic Christianity. A creed with its emphasis upon emptiness led to conduct equally empty of moral content and real worth.

Those who embraced this philosophical-theological attitude were prone to slide into *Antinomian theories and practices*. They concluded that their bodies might be evil, but their spirits were independent of their bodies and undefiled by them. When they once were regenerated they remained pure. The body might be given over to any indulgence in sensual appetites and lusts and the spirit was uncontaminated by these things. A jewel might lie in a dunghill, and be just as much of a jewel as in any other surroundings. It would be separate and secure in its own value wherever it was. This doctrine made possible drunken and licentious professors of holiness. Their spirits were holy even though their bodies were given over to sin. The body was doomed to sin, and it never could escape from it. A profession of faith, an initiation into the true understanding of affairs, was equivalent, therefore, to a license to any degree of immorality in daily life.

We know that Cerinthus was a contemporary of the apostle John. We know that he was a Gnostic, with a pretense to superior knowledge in spiritual things. We know that his teaching was a strange mixture of Asiatic and Jewish and Christian elements. We know that he believed that the Christ was to be distinguished from the man Jesus. The former was a heavenly being, while the latter was an earthly being. The Christ entered into Jesus

at the time of the baptism in the Jordan and left Jesus before the sufferings of the crucifixion. We know how the apostle John hated Cerinthus. Schleiermacher, Neander, Düsterdieck, Ebrard, Huther, Haupt, Keim, Weiss, Salmon, and others think this epistle was written to antagonize Cerinthus. We know that it is adapted to antagonize all dualism and Docetism and Antinomianism of whatever kind.

Whedon says it was written as "a defense of Christian purity from sin against Gnostic purity in sin."⁴⁸ Lipsius and Holtzmann conclude that the epistle attacks the dualistic Gnosticism, which was Christologically Docetic and practically Antinomian. Michaelis, Credner, De Wette, Hausrath, Lücke, Mangold, Reuss, and Schmidt agree. John may have had some of these specific forms of error in mind as he wrote; or he may have thought only of the inevitable and general perversions of the truth to which the Christian doctrine was liable in his day as it has been in all the ages since his day. Anybody who embodied these errors in his life and his teaching would be an antichrist, a liar, and a child of the devil. There have been many such in every period of church history.

Against them all this epistle has lifted up its testimony in eternal protest. It gives no uncertain sound. There is no writing in the New Testament so passionately controversial as this. With all the calmness and dignity of an apostle, with all the peace of one who has attained the incontrovertible truth, John deals sledgehammer blows at all the errorists of his day. All the heresies of history are anticipated and answered here. The church might have been saved from them if all Christians had studied and appreciated and realized within themselves the truths of this epistle. The church may find a safeguard here against all heresies in time to come. Let us cherish it at

⁴⁸ Commentary on New Testament, V, p. 251.

its true worth. It will be found to be serviceable according to our needs to-day.

V. A FINAL AND CROWNING REVELATION

The First Epistle of John is generally considered to be the last book of our Scripture to be written. Jude follows it in our canon, but Jude belongs to a much earlier period. The Apocalypse comes last in our New Testament, but nobody thinks that it was last chronologically. The arrangement of books in our Bible is not a chronological arrangement. The Second and Third Epistles of John are not second and third in time, but in importance. They doubtless were written in some earlier period of John's ministry in Ephesus. The First Epistle of John is the last message from God to man contained in the Sacred Scriptures. It is the last word of the Bible revelation. For the last time an inspired writer sits down to add some closing words to the Holy Book. Surely, this last message will be a precious and important one.

We would not lose one word of those final conversations of Jesus with the disciples recorded alone in the fourth Gospel. We could not spare one word of this final communication of the apostolic age, this last publication of authoritative inspired and canonical truth. We sympathize with the feeling of Chrysostom when he speaks of the writings of John: "Wherefore, as if we all at once saw one stooping down from yonder heaven, and promising to tell us truly of things there, we should all flock to listen to him, so let us now dispose ourselves. For it is from up there that this man speaks down to us. . . . All that he utters is with the steadfast accuracy of truth, and as if he stood upon a rock he budges not. All time is his witness. Seest thou the boldness, and the great authority of his words!—how he utters nothing by way of doubtful conjectures, but all demonstratively, as if passing sentence.

Very lofty is this apostle and full of dogmas, and lingers over them more than over other things!"⁴⁹ What Chrysostom said applies both to the style and the contents of this epistle. It contains a most remarkable series of statements concerning the most fundamental facts of our faith. No other book in the Bible contains a larger number of the essentials in the gospel put so compactly and clearly.

VI. THE EPISTLE OF LOVE

The word "love" occurs more often in this epistle than in any other book of the New Testament and the verb "to love" occurs twice as many times in this epistle as in any other book of the New Testament, except the Gospel according to John. Therefore the epistle has been called the Epistle of Love. Love dominates the thought from beginning to end. Six times John calls his readers, *ἀγαπητοί*, "beloved." Twelve times the noun *ἀγάπη* is found. The verb *ἀγαπάω* is repeated twenty-seven times. Fifty-one times in all the word "love" with its derivatives occurs, and the repetition of the word is only an indication of the continuous burden of the epistle. Augustine said, "*Locutus est multa, et prope omnia de caritate*"—"He has said many things, and almost all about love." Luther said, "The main substance of this epistle relates to love." Calvin said, "It contains doctrine with exhortations, but in no continuous order. He especially insists upon brotherly love, but touches also briefly upon other things."⁵⁰

The brotherly love taught in this epistle may have the warmest affection in it or it may not. It may include passionate regard or it may not. It can be independent of any passing emotion. It rests upon deep-seated principle. It is a feeling of affinity with and obligation to the race.

⁴⁹ In Johan. Homil, I, II, III. Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series, vol. xiv, pp. 2, 5.

⁵⁰ Farrar, *op. cit.*, p. 485.

It is unselfish devotion to the highest interests of others and of all. It is the fixed purpose to help everybody and to do all we can to make the world better by making every man good. It will feed an enemy when he is hungry and give him drink when he is thirsty. It will suffer long with him and be kind to him. It will bear all things, believe all things, hope all things, endure all things. It never will fail, even as Christ's love never failed. What is the use of attempting to define it? The best definition of it is to be found in the life of Jesus. The best personal exhibition of it will be found in the life of the man who walks even as Jesus walked. No man in himself can attain unto it. This love must come from God, and from him alone. He enables us to love as he enabled Jesus to love. All love is from him. Jesus said, "God is your Father," and that was a great revelation. John says, "God is love," and that is the final revelation of the Holy Book concerning God the Father revealed through Jesus Christ.

John is responsible for each of those three remarkable four-word statements of the essential being of God. The first he quotes from the lips of Jesus in the Gospel, "God is a spirit." The other two occur in this epistle, "God is light," and finally "God is love." It is the climaxing truth of the New Testament, the final, culminating, unapproachable formulation of our faith. There is no higher truth contained in the Book. This is the Kohinoor of revelation. This is our incomparable gospel to men. Archbishop Trench was inspired to put it into poetry which ought to be committed to memory or cherished in heart by every ambassador from God to men.

I say to thee, do thou repeat
To the first man thou mayest meet
In lane, highway, or open street,

That he, and we, and all men move
Under a canopy of love
As broad as the blue sky above.

And—ere thou leave him—say thou this,
Yet one word more—they only miss
The winning of that final bliss,

Who will not count it *true*, that love,
Blessing, not cursing, rules above—
And that in it we live and move.

And one thing further make him know,
That to believe these things are so,
This firm faith never to forego—

Despite of all that seems at strife
With blessing—all with curses rife—
That *this is blessing—this is life!*

All other revealed truth must be coordinated with this and subordinated to it. God is Spirit—that is of interest to the metaphysicians and the philosophers. God is light—that is of interest to all seekers after the truth and all pilgrims toward the Holy City. God is love—that is of interest to all alike, just as much to those who never heard of metaphysics and philosophy as to those who have, just as much to the multitudes dwelling in dense ignorance and the throngs crowding the broad and downward way as to the saints who toil up the straight and narrow path. From everlasting to everlasting God is love and nothing but love.

Love is not one of God's attributes. It is the essence of his being. It is the center from which all God's attributes spring. It is their basis and their source. It is the final explanation of all which God has done or may do. It is the one fact to which Christian faith must cling in the face of all the mysteries of Providence and all the untoward circumstances of individual experience or world history. God is Everlasting and Unfailing Love, and, therefore, love is the law of this universe, and it is the will of our God that all men shall share in his love and in all of its benefits. All is love and all is law. All law is of love. Augustine said, "If nothing whatever throughout the other pages of Scripture were said in praise of love, and

this one thing only were all we were told by the voice of the Spirit of God, 'For God is love,' nothing more ought we to require." This epistle shows love to be the central fact in the universe, the central truth of Christian theology, and the central grace in the Christian life. It may well be called the Epistle of Love.

VII. THE EPISTLE OF KNOWLEDGE

No book in the Bible puts a higher premium upon knowledge than this epistle does. Some have called it the Epistle of Knowledge and have tried to show that all its contents could be congregated about this point. There were Gnostics in Ephesus who claimed to know all the mysteries of the truth. John gave them to understand that the Christians could be Gnostics too, and he declares that the Christian Gnostics knew all spiritual truth, "Ye have an anointing from the Holy One, and ye know all things."⁵¹ Tauler the mystic said, "The Holy Ghost will not teach us all things, so that we shall know whether there shall be a good harvest and vintage, whether bread will be dear or cheap, whether the present war will come to an end soon; but all things which we can need for a perfect life and for a knowledge of the hidden truth of God."

Knowledge is power. It always has been and it always will be. Therefore all men always have been desirous to know all things. However, there are some things which we can go without knowing, if need be. It is not necessary that every man shall know how many bones there are in a fish's back or how many rings there are about Saturn. It is not necessary that every man shall know all about the megalosaurus or the primitive protoplasm. But it is an absolute necessity for his present and his future welfare that he know those things which pertain to the

⁵¹ 1 John 2. 20.

right relationship between his soul and his God. There must be a certainty and sufficiency of knowledge concerning his spiritual past, present, and future or he dwells in culpable ignorance here and may go into denser darkness hereafter. John says that we may be anointed and know all these things; all things which affect the soul's salvation, all necessary knowledge concerning the will of our God and our disposition toward him. This is the really important knowledge, and in this field there need be no mental uncertainty, there need be no manner of doubt. In John's estimation all other knowledge drops out of account. It will be partial and unsatisfactory at the best. It will be surrounded by mystery on every side; but in this most essential knowledge of all unto man John says there may be perfect assurance in which the mind and heart and soul, in which the man entire can rest in complete confidence, in entire satisfaction, in perfect peace.

John believed in a knowable salvation, as firmly as John Wesley did. It was the power of this primitive preaching of the Christian faith that it preached great realities which could be tested and proved in personal experience. It proclaimed a salvation which a man could possess and know. That was the power in the preaching of the Wesleyan revival. A type of Christianity had come into general acceptation which could be represented as believing concerning a Christian experience: "If you seek it, you cannot find it; if you have it, you will not know it; and if you lose it, you never had it." This whole epistle is a protest against any such perversion of Christian truth. (Twenty-five times in the epistle John uses the verb "to know." All through the epistle he emphasizes the certainty and sufficiency of our knowledge in spiritual things.

It is the result of our anointing. In the Old Testament times the anointing was given to special individuals, and they were thus inducted into one of the three typical offices of the early kingdom. A man was anointed to be a prophet;

he was anointed to be a priest; he was anointed to be a king. All the nation understood that these anointings were typical of the higher anointing which should be given to the Messias when he came, by virtue of which he was to be both Prophet, Priest, and King, and so worthy to bear that name, the Messias, the Anointed One. Jesus came, and gathered up into himself all the gifts and graces of the three anointings; and he did this, John says, only that he might scatter them abroad again among all his people. The anointing of the Holy One was to be given to all the followers of the Christ. Henceforth there would be no chosen prophets to whom alone the Lord's will would be made known; but *all* would know him from the least to the greatest, and *all* would preach the glad gospel as authorized messengers. Henceforth the Levitical priesthood should perish, but the royal priesthood of the universal Christian Church should be established in its stead. Henceforth no single king should hold a scepter to rule, but every follower of the Christ should be blessed with royal prerogative. Prophets, priests, and kings, the members of the Christian Church from Pentecost to Judgment Day, should dwell in no uncertainty, should be blessed with a fullness of light, should stand in full assurance of the knowledge of the truth. The triple anointing of the Holy One should be upon them, and they should know all things.

See how John illustrates his meaning in five statements in the third chapter of this epistle. "Ye know that he was manifested to take away sins."⁵² "We know that we have passed out of death into life."⁵³ "Hereby shall we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our heart before him."⁵⁴ "Hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he gave us."⁵⁵ "We know that . . . we shall be like him; for we shall see him even

⁵² 1 John 3. 5.

⁵³ 1 John 3. 14.

⁵⁴ 1 John 3. 19.

⁵⁵ 1 John 3. 24.

as he is.⁵⁶ John says that in every stage of Christian experience there is an absolute certainty of knowledge; in conviction, in conversion, in the full assurance of faith, in the abiding baptism of the Holy Spirit or present sanctification, in the glorification which lies beyond. John says "We know" concerning all of these. He says "We know" seventeen times in this epistle, and "Ye know" eight times.

// It does seem that it might be called "An Epistle on the Subject of Christian Knowledge."

John closes the book with three affirmations which sum up the leading thoughts of the epistle.⁵⁷ They set forth the purity, the privilege, and the Presence which characterize the Christian life. Concerning each of these John says, "We know." It is as though he set the seal of universal Christian consciousness upon the conclusions set forth in his book. *This and this and this* are settled matters. We know that these three things are true. "We know that whosoever is begotten of God sinneth not; but he that was begotten of God keepeth himself, and the evil one toucheth him not." We know that purity is possible and victory is assured. "We know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in the evil one." We know our transcendent privilege in fellowship with the Father and in our rescue from Satan's power. "We know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life." We know the Presence who makes our Christian life possible and permanent. He is true. He has the truth. He gives us an understanding. He enables us to know. That is our blessedness—to know and to live. That sums it all up; knowledge, understanding, truth, and life in the eternal enjoyment of these. We

⁵⁶ 1 John 3. 2.

⁵⁷ 1 John 5. 18, 19, 20.

know and we know that we know ; that was John's conviction as to all spiritual truth and that was his challenge to all Gnostics, all the Illuminati, all the advanced thinkers of his own or any later time. "See what we Christians know. We know much more than you do; and we know about better things. We have the anointing of the Holy One and we know all things."

VIII. THE EPISTLE OF THE INCARNATION

The burden of this epistle is the reality of the incarnation. John is concerned that all Christians shall believe and know that Jesus was a brother man. To lose the certainty of the humanity of Jesus would be to lose the sweetest sympathy and the most sufficient comfort of the Christian life. It would be the loss of the strongest motive to holy living. It would rob the example of Christ of all reality and all inspiration. Only he who has a real faith in the real humanity of Jesus will feel the obligation upon him to walk even as he walked.⁵⁸ John says that the greatest lie of the ages will be the denial of the reality of the incarnation.⁵⁹ John says that the very climax of all antagonism to the truth will be manifest in the antichrist who will promulgate this doctrine.

The spirit of the antichrist will be that spirit which is bent upon annulling Jesus.⁶⁰ The Vulgate in this passage reads, "separates Jesus," and we understand that to mean, divides his single personality into two separate, distinct, and incompatible parts, makes him a double-minded, two-souled being, neither God nor man, but God and man, instead of the God-man. Jesus had no two natures. He was one, even as we are one. He lived on our plane. The incarnation was genuine. He did not pretend to ignorance

⁵⁸ 1 John 2. 6.

⁵⁹ 1 John 2. 22.

⁶⁰ 1 John 4. 3, R. V., margin.

when he was omniscient in reality. He did not profess inability to do anything of himself when he was omnipotent in reality. It was no sham humanity he put on. There was no Omnipotent One masquerading behind the human weakness presented in the Gospels. There was no Omniscient One concealing himself behind the show of human surprise and wonder and ignorance of which we read in the Gospels. There was no Omnipresent One behind, back of, beyond, different from, separate from Jesus. The incarnation was not Docetic, but actual. The incarnation was not seeming, but real. The Divine really became human, not partly so, but wholly so, in Jesus. There was not Divinity *and* humanity in him; but Divinity *in* humanity, one and inseparable in thought and in fact. The Word became flesh; God became man; and thereafter he was not God *and* man in any contrasting or distinguishable or separable sense, not *two* entities, *two* personalities, *two* beings, but *one, the God-Man* for evermore. It is to this reality of the incarnation that John clings as the supreme article of his faith.

He knew the facts, and it was not possible for him to doubt it. He had seen and heard and handled the manifest proofs. He knew that those who denied these proofs were liars and antichrists. Could he ever forget that day when Jesus had first said to him, "Come and see"? Could he ever forget any of the incidents of that marvelous day? Did he not remember many other days only less wonderful than that because his eyes were becoming accustomed to this revelation of truth and of grace? He had lived with Jesus. They had journeyed together and worked together. They had reclined at the same table; they had dipped in the same dish. They had been weary and hungry together. Jesus had been his companion, brother, teacher, friend. He had had daily and indisputable proofs of the Lord's true and real humanity. It was a plain and unquestionable fact to him. The denial of that fact was equivalent to a denial

of the whole gospel; for the whole gospel depended on this fundamental truth.

If the incarnation was not a reality, if the Divine Messias was to be distinguished from the man Jesus, then the whole faith was hung on a phantom, the cross was a sham, the death was a delusion, the resurrection was an hallucination, and the ascension was the climax in a long series of a Divine Comedy of Errors; and the Christians were the worst dupes in all history and the most miserable of men on the earth. To assert this was to annul the Christian faith. Therefore the last message of the aged apostle to the Christian Church, the final word of the Book of Divine Revelation to men, was this: "The most important dogma of your faith is that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. The most damnable heresy ever devised among men is the denial of the reality of the incarnation. Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: and every spirit that confesseth not Jesus is not of God: and this is the *spirit* of the antichrist whereof ye have heard that it cometh; and now it is in the world already."⁶¹

IX. THE EPISTLE OF THE ATONEMENT

The Epistle of the Incarnation would naturally be the Epistle of the Atonement. Bishop Warren has said of the First Epistle of John: "No book of the New Testament is so pervaded and saturated with the idea of the atonement by blood. The book contains but five short chapters. In each of the first two and last two is a distinct statement or definition of the atoning work, while the middle chapter has three. Hence there are seven clear testimonies, independent and emphatic; a larger number than can be found anywhere else in the same space. . . ."⁶² There is no refining of the language of the Jewish sacrifices. . . . No inti-

⁶¹ 1 John 4. 2, 3.

⁶² Iliff School Studies, p. 78.

mation is allowed that Christ's death was an instructive spectacle, a most influential example, a power of emotional effect on the beholder. But it was a real substitution of the death of Christ for the eternal death of man."⁶³

In some quarters a "bloody salvation" is as much decried as is "the bloody shirt" in other quarters in politics. Yet these old war veterans who go around with one leg and a crutch, or with an empty sleeve, or with shattered constitution and health, still talk and will talk about the bloody sacrifices of the Civil War and they still think that its bloodshed and sacrifice was the salvation of the nation. It is even so with the veterans of the cross in the New Testament. Their salvation is a salvation obtained by suffering and blood. They are redeemed by the blood, cleansed by the blood, saved by the blood. They have no other gospel to preach.

Let us recall their testimony. Paul declares, God hath set Christ forth "to be a propitiation . . . in his blood."⁶⁴ We have been "justified by his blood."⁶⁵ "We have our redemption through his blood."⁶⁶ "Ye . . . are made nigh in the blood of Christ."⁶⁷ He hath "made peace through the blood of his cross."⁶⁸ God purchased the church "with his own blood."⁶⁹ Peter agrees, "Ye . . . were redeemed with precious blood . . . even the blood of Christ."⁷⁰ We are elect "unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ."⁷¹

John, the beloved disciple, the veteran apostle, last of the great leaders to write his testimony concerning these things, tells us that Jesus loved us and loosed us from our sins in his own blood,⁷² and in heaven they sing about it, "Worthy art thou: . . . for thou wast slain, and didst purchase

⁶³ *Op. cit.*, p. 75.

⁶⁸ Col. 1. 20.

⁶⁴ Rom. 3. 25.

⁶⁹ Acts 20. 28.

⁶⁵ Rom. 5. 9.

⁷⁰ 1 Pet. 1. 18, 19.

⁶⁶ Eph. 1. 7.

⁷¹ 1 Pet. 1. 2.

⁶⁷ Eph. 2. 13.

⁷² Rev. 1. 5.

[men] unto God with thy blood.”⁷³ The saints there have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.⁷⁴ They overcame the adversary because of the blood of the Lamb.⁷⁵ In the First Epistle John has written the final subscription to the faith of the New Testament church, “The blood of Jesus his Son cleanseth us from all sin.”⁷⁶ It is the final protest of Scripture against that over-refinement which shirks the facts.

It may be too that there were those in John’s day who were denying the universal efficacy of the atonement made by Jesus. They may have been claiming it for themselves alone, or limiting it to some circle of the elect. Anyway, John takes occasion in this epistle to state as clearly as it could be stated, “He is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for the whole world.”⁷⁷

X. THE EPISTLE OF PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

This is the Epistle of Personal Experience. Hilgenfeld says of it, “The fresh, vivid, attractive character of the epistle consists exactly in this, that it conducts us with such a predilection into the inner experience of genuine Christian life.”⁷⁸ That is the glory which rests upon these pages. They speak of the knowledge, the privilege, the possession, the experience, the anointing, the light, the love, the life which have been made possible to every Christian.

It surely is noteworthy that in this last literary legacy from the apostolic church, the last picture drawn by an apostle of the possibilities and the realities in the Christian brotherhood, there is no mention of miracles or visions or tongues or any other extraordinary supernatural phenomena. These are all dropped out of view, and only those things remain which are the continuous heritage of be-

⁷³ Rev. 5. 9.

⁷⁶ I John 1. 7.

⁷⁴ Rev. 7. 14.

⁷⁷ I John 2. 2.

⁷⁵ Rev. 12. 11.

⁷⁸ Quoted in Meyer, p. 451.

lievers—fellowship with the Father, the inspiration of the Spirit, pardon, peace, and purity in the practice of prayer and progress in a life of love. These are the topics of supreme importance in the Christian life. They may be few in number, but they outweigh all others in their value to personal Christian experience. The spiritual perception of this epistle is born of the insight of a saint and seer. John lives in the heights. He has continuous fellowship with great thoughts and abiding enjoyment of profound experiences, and he covets the company of all Christians in these things.

XI. THE EPISTLE OF FELLOWSHIP

This is the Epistle of Fellowship. It is the aim of the epistle that its readers may have such fellowship as John himself enjoyed. "That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you also, that ye may have fellowship with us."⁷⁹ Westcott thinks that this is the main thought of the epistle.⁸⁰ It seems to run through the whole course of the discussion. The epistle begins with the statement, "Our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ."⁸¹ It goes on to detail the conditions upon which this fellowship may be maintained, in conformity to the divine will, in communion with the Divine Spirit, in consecration to the divine ideals of light and love. It closes with the statement, "We are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ."⁸² Surely, no man ever was better qualified to speak upon this subject of fellowship between God and man than was the apostle John. He had reclined upon the bosom of Jesus. He had been admitted into the closest intimacy with the Incarnate Lord. For two generations since the ascension of Jesus he had proven the possibility of continuous life in the Presence Divine. He knew what

⁷⁹ I John 1. 3.

⁸⁰ Commentary, p. xlvii.

⁸¹ I John 1. 3.

⁸² I John 5. 20.

he was talking about. He desired that the whole church might know this fellowship, in order that its joy might be full as his own.

The two conditions for the maintenance of this unbroken relationship, John says, are absolute righteousness and unfailing love.⁸³ Righteousness and love are the marks of the children of God. Wickedness and hate are the marks of the children of the devil. Here is the spirit of a Boanerges in theology. "Little children, let no man lead you astray: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous: he that doeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. . . . In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother."⁸⁴

Let the church understand this, then, for all time to come. Fellowship with the Father is to be maintained not by subscription to any creed or union with any organization. Fellowship with the Father is to be maintained only by righteousness, out and out rightness; straightforward, steadfast, unwavering adherence to principle; downright, outright uprightness of character; through and through, thorough and true honesty of purpose; purity of intention, integrity of action everywhere. The man who maintains fellowship with God must be righteous in business, righteous in public, righteous in private, righteous from sunrise to sunset, right with God and right with man while he wakes and while he sleeps. A son of God moves in as steady an orbit as the sun in heaven. The child of God is true to his heart's core, sound from center to circumference. His conscience is as steady as the needle to the pole. He loves the right in his heart. He plans for the right with his head. He does the right with his hands. He will stand for the right, if the heavens totter and the

⁸³ I John 3. 7-10.

⁸⁴ I John 3. 7, 8, 10.

earth reels. He cannot be bought with any bauble. He is not for sale at any price. He neither brags nor runs away. He tells the truth and looks the world and the devil right in the eye.

Righteousness is his characteristic, righteousness of outward conduct and righteousness of inward life. There is no chance here for crookedness, no loophole for hypocrites to hide in, no opportunity for double dealing of any kind. Righteousness always moves along right lines, and always at right angles to anything and everything wrong. The rising tide of Socialism in all the lands to-day urges the social necessity of this primary demand of the apostle John for the Christian life. The Socialists say: "It is simple justice we demand. We will be satisfied with our rights." Their indictment against the Christian Church is that righteousness has not characterized its treatment of the working classes.

However, when the social Utopia has been realized and every man has his just rights, John's standard for the Christian life will be still far in advance of that condition. John says that social righteousness must be the product of Christian love. To maintain fellowship with God the Christian must be kindly affectioned to all men with brotherly love. He must realize the fact that if God is his Father, all men are his brothers. No matter how much some men may differ with him in their tastes or their habits of life, there is some point of sympathy between them which proves affinity. There is a relationship between the most abject savage and the most cultured scholar. There are so many chords in this golden harp of a thousand strings which forms our earthly life that some one can be found to vibrate in unison with those in any other. A touch of nature makes the whole world kin.

Where is that Pharisee who draws his robes of righteousness about him or lifts from your path the royal purple wealth affords or shrouds his face behind a veil of intel-

lectual superiority and gives thanks that he is not as other men? To him let the lie be given. The vilest sinner, the poorest wretch, the most illiterate creature on God's earth is a man, is his brother, has a soul, and will appear before God. His destiny may depend upon the degree in which we love him. Our destiny surely depends upon the degree in which we love him. Our eternal interests are one. Our fortunes for eternity are indissolubly linked. To the child of God all men are his brothers, and he is not only righteous but loving. "In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother."⁸⁵ It is a high standard, this standard of fellowship with the Father of all. It is as much higher than the standard demanded by our social reformers as the Christian millennium will be higher and better than the best of the Utopias planned by them. It is a high standard. Is it too high to be within the reach of men on the earth? It surely would be unless men can be saved entirely from selfishness and from sin. Is that an utter impossibility? John did not think so, as this epistle clearly shows.

XII. THE EPISTLE OF PURITY

This is the epistle which promises cleansing from sin and perfecting in love, the epistle of perfect love in a purified life. Sin and selfishness are incompatible with fellowship with the Father. Only purity and love can fellowship with him. Did John say that he wrote this epistle in order that we might have fellowship with the Father? He says again, "My little children, these things write I unto you that ye may not sin."⁸⁶ The two objects are the same. He aims at sinlessness in order that there may be fellowship. Nothing could be clearer than that John puts the sinner

⁸⁵ 1 John 3. 10.

⁸⁶ 1 John 2. 1.

into one category and the Christian into another. Sin distinguishes the one from the other. The man who sins is a sinner; and the Christian is cleansed from sin and kept from the power of the evil one. It is the normal experience in the Christian life to have constant and complete victory over sin. John aims at sinlessness because sinlessness alone is capable of sustained fellowship with the Father and the Son. Purity was no impossibility. Perfect love to God and man was not contrary to any law of life. Sinlessness was no abnormality in humanity. It is the natural and inevitable result of the presence of the Holy Spirit in the heart.

John is indulging in no visionary flights of rhetoric, but he is stating the simple facts of his own experience and the experience of all who had tested the grace of God in their lives. Hear how he puts the truth. "If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanseth us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin" to be cleansed from, "we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." No man is superior to the need of God's grace. No man can say truthfully that he has no need of a Saviour. The man who thinks *that* is self-deceived and never has realized the facts of the case. Let him search his own heart. Let him see if there is no unrighteousness there and no selfishness that needs to be forgiven and taken away. Then when he has realized his true condition, let him hear the gracious truth, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned," and therefore have no need of forgiveness and cleansing, "we make him a liar, and his word is not in us." It is only upon sinners that these gracious gifts are bestowed. The bestowal of these gifts makes the sinner a child of God. Henceforth he is to be saved from sin.

All sin is Satanic. The child of God is no longer a child

of the devil. "My little children, these things write I unto you that ye may not sin" at all. You may not indulge in sin even once. The aorist tense denotes a single act as distinguished from the abiding state. You are no longer to abide in sin; that goes without saying. You are not to sin in any single act; but if any man be overtaken in a fault, be swept off his feet for an instant, sin in some single act which is clearly opposed to the general current and tenor of his life, we have an Advocate with the Father. Confess to him, and the life will be restored to the state of likeness to the Holy One.⁸⁷ "Whoso keepeth his word, in him verily hath the love of God been perfected."⁸⁸ "Every one that hath this hope *set* on him purifieth himself, even as he is pure."⁸⁹ "Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not."⁹⁰ "Whosoever is begotten of God doeth no sin, because his seed abideth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is begotten of God."⁹¹

It is no physical impossibility which is here posited. It is the moral impossibility, the impossibility a clean man feels of his plunging into a bed of mire for no other reason than that he loves filth. He says: "Let the swine seek their enjoyment in such a place, and let them wallow there to their heart's content. It is impossible for you or for me to think that I could enjoy it. I cannot do such a thing." He can, as far as the physical possibility is concerned. He cannot and remain a clean man. The Christian has no desire to be dirty. His desire is to be clean. With that desire he cannot do anything which would blacken his soul or even his finger tips with the devil's dirt.

Joseph in Potiphar's house was tempted to adultery, and he said to the temptress, "How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?"⁹² He could have done it, if he had so desired. There was no restraining hand.

⁸⁷ 1 John 1. 7 to 2. 1.

⁹⁰ 1 John 3. 6.

⁸⁸ 1 John 2. 5.

⁹¹ 1 John 3. 9.

⁸⁹ 1 John 3. 3.

⁹² Gen. 39. 9.

Possibly he might have escaped detection. There was no seeming prospect of danger to himself in any such indulgence. Yet how could he do it and remain an honest man? How could he do it and retain his self-respect? How could he do it and continue to enjoy the favor of God? He could go to prison for years. He could suffer for righteousness' sake. He could not do that which would forfeit his fellowship with the Father. He could not do that which would make him a child of the devil and no longer a child of God.

In the regeneration of the Christian the Spirit was put within him as the germ of a new life. He brings forth the fruit of the Spirit in all his doings. That is all he can do, as long as that is the only seed he cherishes in his heart. That is John's figure. He is an honest man. Is an opportunity given him to rob somebody and never be discovered? He says: "I cannot. It is impossible for me to think of such a thing. It is no physical impossibility. I see that. Yet it is impossible for me to wrong my brother and maintain my Christian life. I would rather do that than have any sum of money."

He is a total abstainer. Somebody offers him a glass of intoxicating drink and asks him to enjoy it. He says: "I cannot. I have signed the pledge. I cannot do it without breaking my pledge. I cannot do it and maintain my integrity. I would rather do that than have the promised pleasure of getting drunk." Whosoever is begotten of God doeth the will of God and finds in that his highest pleasure; because the seed of the Spirit abideth in him and the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, and peace. He cannot sin, because he is begotten of God and as a child of God he is not willing to risk his Christian heritage for any single pottage mess of the devil.

The white robes of the book of Revelation are the righteousness of the saints, achieved and manifested here upon the earth, recognized and guaranteed forever there in

heaven. John says that those robes are to be spotlessly clean, fine and white and pure as the driven snow; for there will be no print of the devil's dirty fingers on any fold of them. The Christian man keepeth himself and the evil one touches him not. It is as clear as the sunlight that John's standard for the Christian life, as set forth in this epistle, is that of absolute righteousness and perfect love, perfect obedience in perfect purity. He represents this as possible and normal for every Christian. This is the last message from God to man in the Holy Book, as to the Christian vocation and what it involves. Such a standard would cast us into despair if we had not along with it the assurance of sufficient divine help and the promise of present and eternal victory.

XIII. THE EPISTLE OF VICTORY

This is the Epistle of Assured Victory. John lived the overcoming life, and he believed that every Christian might live it as well as he. The devil was a defeated foe. He dared not come near enough to the Christian to touch him. Even in the throng he did not venture to reach forth his hand and touch the hem of his garment. God was greater than the devil and all his imps; and John wrote, "Ye are of God, *my* little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world."⁹³ As surely as God was greater than the devil, the Christian might live secure. As surely as Jesus had come to defeat the devil, the Christian might enter into all the fruits of his conquest and enjoy continuous victory for himself and claim it for the rest of men. "To this end was the Son of God manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil."⁹⁴

There is a school of religious thinkers in the present

⁹³ I John 4. 4.

⁹⁴ I John 3. 8.

day who are not content with the verb in that sentence as John wrote it. They think that Jesus *will be* manifested to destroy the works of the devil. They postpone the amelioration of all of this world's ills until the second coming of the Lord. They believe that this world lieth in the evil one, and that there is no hope of its recovery. They think things are getting worse and worse all the time and they have no call to set them right. They believe in evangelism because individuals may be saved from the general wreck and made ready for the second coming of the Lord. They believe in foreign missionary work because the sooner the heathen nations are evangelized the more reason we may have to expect the speedy second coming of the Lord.

However, they are thoroughgoing pessimists as to the power set loose upon this world in the first coming of our Lord. They expect the devil to win in the first round of the battle. They search the newspapers for the signs of the times, and they find them in every evidence of corruption and the approaching dissolution of the present status of things. While the rest of us look hopefully to the coming days, they prophesy woe upon woe unto the very end. While the rest of us see in the slow evolution of the ages the steady uplifting of the race, the survival of the fittest in physical and moral life, they find nothing but the evidences of continuous degeneration and the fulfillment of the devil's great expectations at every point. While all classes are being roused to new effort for social betterment and community good, they have a feeling that this is flying in the face of Providence; and that seriously to endeavor to construct an earthly paradise would be to falsify Scripture and defeat the revealed program of God.

We believe that they are unscriptural themselves. We believe that Jesus *was* manifested to destroy the works of the devil, and that the power sufficient to destroy all the devil's works on earth is even now at our command. We believe that the regeneration of any individual is positive

proof that all individuals may be regenerated even as they all are now redeemed. We believe that foreign missionary work, to be scriptural and apostolic and Christlike, must aim not only at the evangelization but also at the thorough-going Christianization of all the peoples in all the lands. We believe that all effort to make men better and to improve their physical and mental and moral and spiritual condition is in accordance with the revealed will of God. We believe in helping men, individually and collectively; and we believe that with the help of God all men may be helped as all men have been helped in all the ages past. We believe that the world is growing better all the time. We believe that there are many things which ought to be better than they are at present and we believe that we are put into this world to better them. We believe that it is the task and the glorious privilege of the Christian Church to usher in the kingdom of God everywhere, until the will of our God is done upon earth as it is done in heaven. We labor to that end, in confident faith that all the victories of the past are only the beginnings of yet greater victories to come. Greater is he that is with us than any power which may be brought against us, and therefore we may rest in the assurance of victory.

That is the spirit of the apostle John in his old age here in Ephesus. He knows that the devil is active, and there are many antichrists, and there are some deserters, and the world seems hostile, but he is not alarmed. He is as calm as if there were no conflict on hand. He is so sure that it will end in triumph for his Lord that it never occurs to him to be nervous about it. It is this atmosphere of perfect assurance and peace which seems to have impressed Haupt most in this First Epistle. He mentions it again and again. He says, "As when, in a firmly built house, the master, hearing the storm without, gives one more glance around to see that all is secure, while still he knows that he is sheltered and safe, and, indeed, the more furiously the tempest

blows, feels all the more sense of security, so it is with this epistle, which gives us the feeling of an inexpressibly beautiful peace and silent confidence of joy diffused through it from beginning to end."⁹⁵ Again he writes: "Here comes in that character of the epistle which has been indicated above: its rest and its peace, as if adjusted to the most joyful relations; its internal release from all the agitation of the world, as if its author were looking out from a secure haven into the tumult of the distant sea."⁹⁶

The haven in which John rests is the haven of faith in the unfailing and unequaled power of his Lord. He depends upon it with absolute trust in its triumph in the end. If Jesus *was* manifested to destroy the works of the devil, then the works of the devil will be destroyed. The devil may rage, but his doom is declared. *He* has reason to be nervous, but the Christian goes ahead in calm confidence that the will of his God will be accomplished in due time. The assurance of victory gives him perfect peace *all* the time. That is the faith in which this final New Testament epistle is written. It is an Epistle of Victory from beginning to end.

We are glad that our New Testament closes with a bugle blast of defiance to the world, the flesh, and the devil. We are glad that the last book written is a trumpet note of triumph for all time. Its first chapter pictures the victory over sin. Its second chapter proclaims the victory over the evil one. Its third chapter announces the victory of righteousness. Its fourth chapter declares the victory of love. The fifth chapter peals forth the victory of faith. Hear how John repeats his confidence in individual and universal spiritual victory. "I write unto you, young men, because ye have overcome the evil one."⁹⁷ And immediately again, "I have written unto you, young men, because

⁹⁵ Haupt, Commentary on the First Epistle of John, p. 362.

⁹⁶ P. 364.

⁹⁷ 1 John 2. 13.

ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the evil one.”⁹⁸ Again he strikes the note of triumph for all his children in the faith, “Ye are of God, *my* little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world.”⁹⁹ Finally his voice rings out over the whole Church of Christ for all time to come, “Whatsoever is begotten of God overcometh the world, and this is the victory that hath overcome the world, *even* our faith.”¹⁰⁰ The world has been overcome. The victory has been won. Faith claims it and claims it now.

Jesus was manifested to destroy the works of the devil. The devil called himself the prince of this world. He had his stronghold in the hearts of men. As the stronger man our Lord entered into the palace of the strong and took possession of all its furnishings. Then from the cross-top he made the further descent into the depths of hell and the grave; and he came back with the shout of victory, bearing the keys of hell in his hand, to live for evermore in undisputed triumph and rulership over all his universe. Now it is true that whithersoever we go Jesus will be with us. We never can get beyond his providence and his power. We never need be without his sympathy and his aid. We can sing with the psalmist: “If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me.”¹⁰¹

We never can go anywhere as the children of God, we never can be anywhere in all the experiences of life here or hereafter, as long as we trust him, where he cannot give us present and continuous victory. Yea, though he should send us into the very centers of the enemy’s territory and

⁹⁸ 1 John 2. 14.

⁹⁹ 1 John 4. 4.

¹⁰⁰ 1 John 5. 4.

¹⁰¹ Psa. 139. 8-10.

power, into the midst of the hotbeds of vice, into the haunts of sin and iniquity, into what may seem to be a veritable hell on earth, we will be strong and of a good courage. Yea, though he should give us to be tried with all the multiplied devices of Satan which our past life has known and which in the future may be increased and intensified, we will not be afraid, neither will we be dismayed. Yea, though we walk through the valley of the shadow of death, we will fear no evil. For the Lord our God will be with us; and there will be victory with him, whithersoever we go.

This is the note of triumph with which the First Epistle of John and with which our New Testament ends. We have overcome the evil one in ourselves; and this is the victory that hath overcome the world, even our faith. There is no form of evil we need fear to attack. No matter how strongly it is entrenched, it can be and it will be overthrown. There is no principle opposed to righteousness and love which is invincible. However long it may have lasted, it is facing now toward the day of its final doom. Jesus was manifested to destroy all the works of the devil. He has done it within us and he has commissioned us as his agents to carry forward the conquest to the ends of the earth. Ye are of God, my little children, and ye have overcome; because greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world.

"We know that whosoever is begotten of God sinneth not; but he that was begotten of God keepeth himself, and the evil one toucheth him not."¹⁰² There is our Purity, undefiled by even the devil's touch. "We know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in the evil one."¹⁰³ There is our Privilege, a privilege which we must share with all other men until by right of conquest it has taken possession of all the earth. "We know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we

¹⁰² I John 5. 18.

¹⁰³ I John 5. 19.

know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, *even* in his Son Jesus Christ.”¹⁰⁴ There is the Presence who insures our triumph for evermore. He will be true. We are in him that is true. The only question is, Will we be true to him? John does not doubt that the church will be true, but he closes with that warning and exhortation, “*My little children, guard yourselves from idols.*”¹⁰⁵

That is the last word of the aged apostle. That is the last word of the Holy Book. Let no one think that because victory is assured to faith he may fold his hands and take things easy in the Christian life. Faith is not compatible with laziness. It is not characteristic of easy-going folk. It belongs to robust spirits. It is an exercise of the strongest characters. There is heroic quality in it. It is a soldier’s attribute. One must keep alive and alert. One must keep awake and on his guard. One must battle like a Boanerges. The battle will be a winning one. The victory will be sure. Only there must be no negligence, no carelessness, no going to sleep on any post of duty. One must be on guard all the time. There in Ephesus the whole atmosphere was filled with reverence for Artemis. It was not easy to keep clear of all complications with the prevalent idolatry. In our day the whole atmosphere is filled with the idolatry of riches and power and position and success. It is not easy to keep clear of all complications with its thousand and one insidious modes of attack. The child of God must be true to him and have no other gods before him. He cannot serve God and any of the idols. He must cling to him and despise the others. The love of God must be supreme in his heart always. “*My little children, keep yourselves from idols; and God will give you the Privilege of His Presence and His Purity and His Victory for evermore.*” That is John’s last written message to men.

¹⁰⁴ 1 John 5. 20.

¹⁰⁵ 1 John 5. 21.

PART IV

THE MINOR EPISTLES OF JOHN

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THE MINOR EPISTLES OF JOHN

I. GENERAL CHARACTER

1. The Second and Third Epistles of John are specimens of the less important religious correspondence of the apostolic age. The Muratorian Fragment says of Paul's letters to Timothy and Philemon, "They are written out of private affection, and yet to the honor of the catholic church." The same thing might be said of these epistles, for they have even less general interest than the Pastoral Epistles have, and yet they have been treasured by the general church.

2. They are unoriginal, and add almost nothing to the treasury of New Testament truth. Of the thirteen verses in Second John, eight are repeated in substance in First John. There is only one distinctive passage in each of these Minor Epistles—2 John 10, 11 and 3 John 9, 10.

3. Holtzmann calls these two epistles *Zwillings-geschwister*, "twin sisters." Jerome had given them the same name. They belong together. They have the same general characteristics. Short as they are, we note a general agreement, (1) in the use of peculiar expressions, (2) in similar grammatical constructions, (3) in the association of the same ideas, (4) in the definitions given to favorite terms, and (5) in the object they aim at—the consolation of believers in special trials and their strengthening with apostolic advice and authority.

II. THE EXTERNAL EVIDENCE

There seems to have been a comparative lack of acquaintance with these two epistles in the early church. There

are at least three good reasons for this. 1. Their brevity. They are the shortest writings in the sacred canon. 2. Their unimportant character. We could spare them from the sacred canon more easily than any other two books there. 3. Their lack of any special or original matter. As private letters they did not appeal to the interest of the general church. They were so simple and clear in their meaning that they did not need any commentary. One can easily see how in making up a collection of writings for use in the public worship of any church these epistles might have been omitted, even though the compiler had known of their existence. Taking these things into consideration, the external evidence for these epistles is as good as could be expected.

Irenæus quotes 2 John 10, 11 as the words of "John, the disciple of the Lord." Clement of Alexandria quotes from them, and it may be that he commented on them in a book now lost. Dionysius of Alexandria speaks of the apostle John writing the Second and the Third Epistles "anonymously, as the presbyter." The church in North Africa recognized the Second Epistle in a synod held at Carthage A. D. 256. It was included in the *Itala*. Salmond sums up the favorable evidence for the Second Epistle as follows: "The most ancient historical testimony, therefore, although it is of limited quantity, is in favor of the authorship by the apostle John. It is testimony that comes from sources so far apart as Gaul, Alexandria, and North Africa. It is confirmed by the resemblance of Second John to First John; the considerations which go to establish the Johannine origin of the latter being so far available also for the Johannine origin of the former."¹ This resemblance to the style of John is, of course, equally true of the Third Epistle.

On the other hand, Origen puts these epistles among the doubtful writings of the New Testament canon, and he

¹ Hastings's Bible Dictionary, vol. ii, 740.

never uses them or quotes from them himself. Eusebius put them among the Antilegomena. They were rejected by Theodore of Mopsuestia. They were not noticed by Theodoret. They were mentioned doubtfully by Gregory of Nazianzen. They were not included in the Peshito, the Bible of the Syrian Church, though they are mentioned by Ephraem, the greatest of the Syrian Fathers. When First John, First Peter, and James had been admitted to the Syrian canon, these epistles were still excluded, and they are not found in The Syrian New Testament until 1630. They are not quoted by Tertullian or by Cyprian, and as late as the fourth century there seems to have been determined opposition to their admission to the canon of the church in North Africa. The testimony of the Muratorian Fragment is doubtful, since the text is too corrupt for us to be sure of it. Jerome received the two epistles as canonical, but he says, "Many say that John the presbyter wrote them."

It is evident, therefore, that the testimony for these two epistles is not as good as that for most of our New Testament books. We may consider the reasons we have assigned as sufficient to account for this, or we may decide to regard these epistles as of lesser authority and minor importance among the New Testament writings.

III. THE INTERNAL EVIDENCE

This seems to be better than the external evidence, for, as Salmond says of the three Johannine epistles, "They are so much of the same stamp that in all ages the prevailing, if not absolutely universal, opinion has been, that they come from the same mint and are by the same hand. They are writings in which the profound and the simple kiss each other, great and inexhaustible thoughts being wedded to the clearest and least ambitious terms. They combine the qualities of majesty, maturity, authority, and serenity

with occasional fire and vehement utterance. . . . It has been the prevailing belief from the oldest times that they are all three apostolic writings, and part of the legacy of the beloved disciple to the church."² They have the Johannine spirit and style, ideas and ideals. They use the Johannine words in the Johannine way. Weiss says, "It is quite incomprehensible how these two small epistles could have maintained their position and acquired canonical authority in the church unless they had been handed down as apostolic memorials."³

IV. JOHN THE ELDER

If the apostle wrote these epistles, why did he call himself "the elder"?⁴ We may suggest several reasons. 1. Papias evidently used this title to represent all of those who had companied with the Lord. He calls all of the apostles by this name. If this was a general church designation for these revered fathers and leaders in the faith, this last survivor of their number very fittingly might call himself "*the elder*," the one remaining representative of a generation past. 2. John's great age would in itself be a sufficient occasion for his choice of this name, as Credner and Bleek have seen. 3. It may have been an official title and have represented his position of dignity in the church, as Lücke and Düsterdieck have thought. Did not Peter write in his epistle, "The elders therefore among you I exhort, who am a fellow elder"?⁵ As Peter here puts himself on a plane of equality with other officials in the church, so John may have hesitated to arrogate to himself any superior claims as an apostle, and with characteristic modesty have called himself an elder with only the authority any elder might have.

There may have been something of all of these reasons

² Hastings's Bible Dictionary, vol. ii, p. 728.

³ Introduction, vol. ii, p. 197.

⁴ 2 John 1 and 3 John 1.

⁵ 1 Pet. 5. 1.

entering into John's choice of this title. He may have meant to say to those to whom he wrote: "I am an official in the church. I am the most aged among them. I belong to that company who were supremely privileged in the fact that they saw and loved and lived with the Lord of truth and love and life. Hear me, therefore."

V. THE PERSON ADDRESSED IN THE SECOND EPISTLE

The best reading is *ἐκλεκτὴ κυρία*. How shall we translate these words? If they represent a proper name, three possibilities are open to us:

1. We may read "to the elect Kyria." Athanasius so understood it. He says, "John is writing to Kyria and her children." Bengel, Lücke, Düsterdieck, Brückner, De Wette, Guericke, Credner, Neander, Olshausen, Bishop Alexander, Dean Alford, Davidson, Bleek, Ebrard, and others have followed the opinion of Athanasius at this point. This proper name has been found upon an ancient inscription. It corresponds to the Hebrew name "Martha," inasmuch as both are feminine forms of the word for "Lord." The address of the Second Epistle would be like the address of the Third Epistle, if both contained a proper name. However, the Third Epistle is addressed to Gaius the beloved; and this is the natural order of the Greek. If John had been writing to a woman whose name was Kyria and he had desired to call her "the chosen one" or "the elect," he ought to have transposed the order of the words in the Greek and written "Kyria the elect" rather than "the elect Kyria," just as in Rom. 16. 13 we find *Ῥοῦφον τὸν ἐκλεκτόν*, "Rufus the elect."

2. Following this order in the Greek, it would be possible to translate "to Eclecta the lady." Clement of Alexandria so understood it. He says, "The epistle was written to a Babylonian lady named Eclecta." Grotius, Wetstein, and Bishop Middleton have followed the opinion of Clement

at this point. Our objections to this view are that (1) though the masculine form "Eclectus" occurs as a proper name, we know of no example of the use of the feminine form "Eclecta" as the name of a woman, and (2) we would be under the necessity of reading in the thirteenth verse, "The children of thy sister Eclecta salute thee," and that would give us two women of the same strange name in one family. This seems most unlikely.

3. We might translate both words as proper names and read, "To Eclecta Kyria," but this would give to one woman two very unusual names, one very rare and the other without a parallel.

4. If we decide that neither of the words represents a proper name, then the best translation is "to the elect lady." With this translation there are at least three interpretations of the phrase: (1) Jerome declared that this epistle was addressed to the general church under this title. Hilgenfeld, Lünemann, and Schmiedel have followed him in this opinion. This suggestion surely goes to pieces on verse 13. What could the phrase, "the children of thy elect sister" mean? (2) *Œcumenius* and *Theophylact* said that an individual church was addressed under this form. A large number of modern scholars have adopted this view, among them Michaelis, Huther, Hammond, Hilgenfeld, Baur, Wordsworth, Ewald, Luthardt, Lightfoot, Salmon, Hofmann, Holtzmann, Wieseler, Weiss, Wolf, Whitby, and Whiston.

At the close of Peter's epistle we read, "She that is in Babylon, elect together with *you*, saluteth you."⁶ This is very generally understood to mean, "The church in Babylon salutes you." It is argued that here we have a parallel case in which the elect sister is an individual church. However, it seems doubtful that any such symbolism should be introduced into a short epistle like Second John, and it

⁶ 1 Pet. 5. 13.

would be without a parallel in the New Testament if an individual church should be called a "lady." The church is called the bride of Christ, in a book which is given up to religious symbolism from beginning to end,⁷ but in no instance is the church called a lady. (3) There remains, therefore, only one possible understanding of this phrase. The person addressed is "the elect lady," *der auserwählten Frau*, as Luther translated it, and this elect lady is some woman with whom the apostle had become acquainted and in whose home in all probability he had been entertained, and in whose children he had come to take a personal interest. This is the conclusion of our English versions. Beza, Schleiermacher, Mill, Macknight, Lardner, Plummer, Farrar, Salmond, and others agree.

VI. SOME NOTES ON THE SECOND EPISTLE

1. Keynotes. The word "truth" occurs five times, "love" four times, "commandment," four times. These may be called the keynotes of the epistle. The term "walking" is found three times. These Christians are walking in the truth (verse 4). They are exhorted to walk after the Lord's commandment (verse 6). This is declared to be a proof of love (verse 6). Walking in love, walking in obedience, walking in truth—these are three definitions of the Christian life. In a sense they are synonymous, and in a sense they are complementary. Love leads to obedience and cannot be maintained without it. Obedience, unless it is servile and unworthy, is the result of love and the manifest proof of it. Both obedience and love demand truth in the inward parts. They flourish only in the realm of reality.

2. The deceiver and the antichrist mentioned in the seventh verse is the one who denies the reality of the incarnation, the one who does not confess that Jesus Christ

⁷ Rev. 21. 9.

came in the flesh. He who robs the church or any individual believer of a real faith in the genuine humanity of Jesus does an irreparable injury.

3. In verses 10 and 11 John the Boanerges tells us how to treat such heretics and deceivers. He tells us to give them neither greeting nor lodging. One winter night some years ago I was seated before the blazing logs in the fireplace of a comfortable farmhouse in southern Ohio, when we were startled by a loud halloo at the garden gate outside. The farmer went out to see what was wanted. He returned a few moments later and said that two men who had announced themselves as Mormon missionaries had asked for a night's lodging and he had turned them away. It was about ten o'clock at night and bitter cold. There were no hotels within many miles. I wondered what the poor fellows would do. I asked my uncle about it, and he did not seem much interested. He simply remarked that they did not want men like that in their neighborhood. I learned the next day that those two Mormon missionaries had gone on down the country road, asking for entertainment at every farmhouse they found on it, and they had been turned away from every door until they had traveled about twelve miles and it was two o'clock at night. Then they found a man who allowed them to sleep on the hay in his barn until morning.

There had been no collusion among those neighbors. They had not been expecting these visitors. Every man had decided for himself that he could not afford to grant them hospitality. It was no lack of the milk of human kindness. I never knew a community more generous with lodgings and meals and more unstinted in its hospitality on ordinary occasions. The only reason for that treatment of these men was that they announced themselves as Mormon propagandists, and every one of those Ohio farmers decided at once that he would not be a party to the introduction of any such despicable doctrine, even to the extent

of harboring its missionaries over one night. They were all of them patriots. That neighborhood had sent its sons without hesitation into the ranks in the Civil War. They believed that Mormonism was heretical and treasonable and they would have nothing to do with it. They were largely of Puritan stock and they had the downright spirit of a Boanerges in their adherence to principle. They were literally faithful to the command of John in this epistle, although it may be doubtful if any one among them thought of it or knew about it. John says, "If any one cometh unto you, and bringeth not this [Christian] teaching, receive him not into *your* house, and give him no greeting: for he that giveth him greeting partaketh in his evil works."⁸²

Does this seem rather harsh when taken as a general principle? The general principle is simply that we must not become partakers in evil deeds. Any social amenities which fall short of that may be allowable. However, it would be well to remember that the apostle John in all probability is not laying down general principles here, but giving advice to a particular woman in a particular situation. Since John addresses this lady and says nothing of her husband, it might be a fair supposition that she was a widow and had by her bereavement come to be the responsible head of the household. Then as a widow the hospitality of her home would need to be specially guarded; and as a widow the care of her children would need to be more particularly a matter of concern.

Designing men must not be admitted within the circle of her family, for her children might be led astray by those whose only intent was to deceive. Their salvation and their security from harm was her first concern, and all else was to bend to that end. No one must be permitted under the shelter of her roof to undermine the faith of her

⁸² John 10, 11.

family; and if the zealous propagators of any form of evil heresy were known to be about the town, it would be just as well for the woman who was the head of a family to abstain from all social intercourse with them. If she did not know them, she would be free from all obligation to them and need not even greet them on the street. From this point of view the command of the apostle does not seem so harsh, and it may have been justified absolutely by the circumstances of the particular case, concerning which we know nothing. It may well have a lesson for us against undue laxity and indifference indicated by the social and personal recognition of heresy until we are hindered by our sense of hospitality and social obligation from bearing our decided testimony against doctrinal error of the most insidious and deceptive kind. A little more loyalty to principle and a little more readiness to stand by our colors would not hurt most of us to-day.

4. Upon our understanding of the person addressed in this epistle it bears its tribute to the dignity of wifehood and motherhood and womanhood. John recognizes this elect sister as the head of her household and her home as the conservator of the Christian virtues and graces. John knew the influence of a good mother himself. Here in Ephesus in his old age he recalled the ministries of Salome in that Galilæan home so many years before. Later he had had in his own home the mother of his Lord. Mary and Salome must have been ideal mothers, and John honored their memory by honoring this mother in addressing one of his epistles to her. She was an elect lady, and therefore John wrote her. John wrote her a letter, and therefore she will be an elect lady for evermore.

VII. NOTES ON THE THIRD EPISTLE

1. The word "truth" occurs six times, and is the dominant word in the epistle.

2. In the ninth verse there is a reference to a former epistle, which in all probability is a lost epistle. There seems to be no reason for supposing that the reference is to either First or Second John. We judge that it had to do with the affairs of this local church and probably it contained some introductions or recommendations of traveling evangelists who represented the apostle John or had his indorsement, but whom Diotrephes would not receive.

3. The facts given here suggest a very interesting picture of early church life. They furnish us a glimpse of the inside difficulties of administration and discipline besetting the church even in these beginning days.

4. The three names mentioned may stand as types of three characters to be found in almost every local church history. There is Gaius the beloved. He may have an invalid body, but he has a robust soul. He walks in the truth and proves his love to the brethren by the bounty of his hospitality to them whenever they visit this church. The apostle John always enjoyed entertainment in his home. Then there is the domineering Diotrephes, who is ambitious to be the church dictator. He heads the opposition party and is a man of fluent and persuasive speech. He has influence enough to make things unpleasant for Gaius and even to threaten his expulsion from the membership. Against the authority of the apostle John he prates with wicked words. Then there is Demetrius, who may be the innocent cause of all of the present trouble. He is a worthy man and has a good reputation everywhere. He has come into this community with the indorsement of the apostle John and he has been entertained by Gaius; and that is enough to settle his case with Diotrephes. The latter decides to drive him out of that neighborhood and to discipline or cast out of the church Gaius, his hospitable host. Possibly he has succeeded in doing both things, and the apostle John having heard of it writes this epistle to Gaius to reassure him concerning Demetrius and to comfort him with his

word of approval for all he had done. In the Second Epistle the apostle warned the elect lady against the abuse of her hospitality by the unauthorized and heretical itinerants who under the guise of a religious propaganda made their way into Christian homes and led many astray. In the Third Epistle he praises the hospitality of Gaius, whose home has been opened to the duly authorized and wholly worthy itinerant evangelist Demetrius, and who has brought trouble upon his own head in so doing. Both epistles have to do with the subject of hospitality, with the refusal of hospitality to some and with the continuance of hospitality to others.

VIII. VALUE OF THESE EPISTLES

1. They are of great interest to the church historian. They present a picture of the condition of affairs in the period of transition from the apostolic to the postapostolic times. They suggest the errors of doctrine and the troubles of internal organization with which the early church had to contend. Evidently, there were teachers of heresy and ambitious church laymen from the very beginning. Harnack thinks that Diotrephe was the first bishop of the monarchical type whose name is mentioned in history. We think, rather, that the apostle John was the bishop whose authority had been supreme in this church and that Diotrephe was a layman who aspired to be the church autocrat and was ready to defy the representatives of John and to oppose their preaching with his blatant doubts and denials and many wicked words.

Anyway, in both the churches of which we are given glimpses in these epistles there were those who walked in the truth and those who went about with the purpose to deceive. There were the good and loving and obedient and there were the wicked and hateful and self-willed. There was the spirit of the Christ and the spirit of the anti-christ. There were traveling evangelists who had the

witness of the truth and there were traveling heretics who did not deserve a friendly greeting in the street. There were homes hospitably open to the good and homes closed tight against the bad. There was very much the same condition we find in any small country church community to-day.

2. These epistles are of interest to all devout people for the deep spirituality of their contents, although that might have been found elsewhere in the New Testament if these two epistles had been lost.

3. Together with the Epistle to Philemon they "furnish an apostolic sanction to private letters on religious themes."⁹ It is questionable whether any apostolic sanction would have been needed for such religious correspondence; but these letters are interesting as the first specimens extant of that worthy department of world literature. The world surely would be much poorer if it were deprived of the letters of Basil and Gregory of Nazianzen and Gregory of Nyssa and Gregory the Great and Jerome and Augustine and Luther and Bengel and John Newton and Cowper and Doddridge and McCheyne and Robertson and Romaine and John Wesley and Samuel Rutherford. Rutherford's Letters are better known to-day than his sermons or his theological works. When they had been gathered into a volume and published, Richard Baxter said of them, "Hold off the Bible, such a book the world never saw." McCheyne was a saintly soul, and his biography shows that Rutherford's Letters and the Bible were the two books he took with him into the closet of prayer.

John Wesley's Letters deserve to be read much more than they are to-day. Many of them are worthy to rank with the best of the church's treasures of this kind. These New Testament epistles are gems of the first order. Paul and John knew how to say much in little and how to say

⁹ Donald Fraser, *Lectures on the Bible*, vol. ii, p. 291.

it well. It is not an easy thing to write a good religious letter. Those of us whose duty it is sometimes to write them have learned that by experience. As apostolic models these letters may suggest some points of excellence in correspondence of this character. Religious letters should be brief. They should go straight to the point. They should be free from platitudes. They should be courteous, sympathetic, true to the facts and true to the spirit of Christ.

4. Their teaching is valuable. They tell us how to conduct ourselves toward heretical propagandists. They inculcate due respect for worthy laymen and laywomen and love and help for all preachers who have made sacrifices for "the sake of the Name." Daniel Steele used to declare that they made him more contented with presiding elders and bishops, district or general superintendents who could step in when it was necessary and support the pastor and teach a usurper better manners. When the general superintendents are on the right side they are a great comfort. If they should happen to be on the side of the rich and the ambitious as against the pious and the poor, their interference is not always most helpful.

5. Professor J. Rendel Harris has suggested that these two epistles may serve us in some of our problems of textual criticism. He calls attention to the fact that the Second Epistle has 1,143 letters, and the Third has 1,124. In the Second Epistle at the 976th letter John says, "Having many things to write unto you, I would not *write them* with paper and ink." In the Third Epistle at the 967th letter John says, "I had many things to write unto thee, but I am unwilling to write them to thee with ink and pen." The closing greetings in the Second Epistle have 168 letters, and in the Third Epistle 158 letters. Now, Professor Harris suggests that John closed his epistles at just this point and with the use of just so many letters because he saw that he was at the end of his sheet.

Beginning with this clue, Professor Harris pursues his

investigations through various fields of prices, styles, and measures of ancient writing materials and comes out at last upon the proposition that he can tell just how many pages of just what size the original copy of each of our New Testament books had, and he thinks that he can decide within half a dozen letters just how many letters each page contained. Applying the measuring rule thus obtained, he has a means of deciding between the longer and the shorter readings in our New Testament text. He concludes, for example, against Matt. 17. 21, "This kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting." This verse is not found in our New Testament to-day. There were better reasons for its rejection than this application of Professor Harris's measuring rule; but it surely is interesting to find that his rule agrees with the readings of the oldest and best texts at this point.

Incidentally, these two short epistles may serve us in the ways we have indicated. They do not compare in importance with the First Epistle, of course. They were slower in obtaining recognition in the New Testament canon. However, we are glad that they have been preserved for us. They are worthy of the apostle John. They give us some added glimpse of his abiding characteristics. He is the same saintly Boanerges we have known from other sources. He may have written these epistles at almost any time during his ministry in Asia Minor.

PART V
THE APOCALYPSE

PART V

THE APOCALYPSE

I. RELATION TO THE OTHER JOHANNINE WRITINGS

The Apocalypse is a unique book. All the other books of our New Testament are histories or letters. John wrote one of the histories and three of the letters. The Apocalypse represents an entirely different form of literature. It is so different, not only from all the other books of the New Testament but also from the other books written by John, that Dionysius of Alexandria was sure that we had a new author here as well as a new vehicle of literary expression. So little has been added to what Dionysius said on this subject that in enumerating the differences between the Apocalypse and the other writings of John we may as well begin with his statement of the case.

Dionysius was Bishop of Alexandria about the middle of the third century, succeeding the great Origen as the head of the catechetical school in that city. He decided that John did not write the Apocalypse, and he gave the following reasons. 1. "The evangelist nowhere gives his name, or proclaims himself, either in the Gospel or epistle. . . . But the author of the Apocalypse introduces himself in the very beginning. The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which he gave him to show unto his servants quickly; and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John, who bare witness of the word of God and of his testimony, even of all things that he saw, 1. 1, 2. Then he writes also an epistle; John to the seven churches which are in Asia, grace be with you, and peace, 1. 4. But the evangelist did not prefix his name even to the Catholic Epistle; but without intro-

duction he begins with the mystery of the divine revelation itself: That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, 1 John 1. 1. Neither in the reputed Second and Third Epistle of John, though they are very short, does the name John appear; but there is written the anonymous phrase, 'the elder.' But this author did not consider it sufficient to give his name once and to proceed with his work; but he takes it up again: I, John, who also am your brother and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and the patience of Jesus Christ, was in the isle that is called Patmos for the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus, 1. 9. And toward the close he speaks thus: Blessed is he that keepeth the words of the prophecy of this book, and I, John, who saw and heard these things. 22. 7, 8.¹

This, then, is the first difference which Dionysius points out. In the Gospel and in the epistles John seems bent upon concealing his own identity. At least we decided that his modesty was apparent in his evident omission of his own name and the suppression of his own personality and authority. He mentions himself only when it seemed to be a necessity, and then he prefers to call himself by some title which others besides himself might claim, "the elder," or "the disciple whom Jesus loved." The author of the Apocalypse seems bent upon emphasizing his own personality. He repeats his own name three times in the first chapter and once more at the close. Is this consistent with the character of John as we have read it in the other books?

The answer usually given to this inquiry is as follows: All the historical books of the Old Testament are anonymous, except Nehemiah. All the prophetic books, on the contrary, have the author's name prefixed. Here, then, would seem to be the rule in Hebrew literature, and the writers of our New Testament, being Jews, have followed

¹ Eusebius, Eccles. Hist., vii, 25. Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series, vol. i, p. 310.

it. As a historian John suppresses his name. As a prophet he puts his name at the very forefront of his work. This may be a satisfactory and sufficient explanation of this manifest difference between the Gospel and the Apocalypse. John claims to be a prophet. In the beginning he says, "Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of the prophecy."² Again, in the middle of the book, he records that he was told, "Thou must prophesy again over many peoples and nations and tongues and kings."³ In the closing chapter he makes three several statements concerning "the words of the prophecy of this book,"⁴ and the angel speaks to him of his "brethren the prophets."⁵ It would seem clear, therefore, that John himself believed that he belonged to the illustrious company of the prophets of Israel.

However, his book does not belong properly to the prophetic literature. It belongs, rather, to the department of Apocalyptic; and John calls it rightly by that title, "The Apocalypse of Jesus Christ."⁶ It was not customary among the writers of the Jewish Apocalypses for the author to prefix his own name to his work as John has prefixed his name here. If John is the author, then this is the single instance in which an Apocalypse is published under the real author's name. Therefore if we attempt to explain John's use of his own name as a guarantee for his own work upon the basis of Jewish custom, we must acknowledge that he does not follow the Jewish custom for works of this character, but, rather, that he counts himself with writers of another sort and follows their custom, although he is writing a book of a radically different character. At any rate, there is this striking contrast between the Gospel and the Apocalypse and between the epistles and the Apocalypse, as Dionysius pointed out. The name is prominent here and wholly

² Rev. 1. 3.

⁵ Rev. 22. 9.

³ Rev. 10. 11.

⁶ Rev. 1. 1.

⁴ Rev. 22. 7, 10, 18, 19.

lacking there. Dionysius thought that that fact argued different authorship.

He goes on to say that the author of the Apocalypse does not say that he was the beloved disciple of the Lord, or the one who lay on his breast, or the brother of James, or in any way identify himself with the evangelist. He calls himself simply our brother and companion, and a witness of Jesus. There were many Johns, like John Mark, who accompanied Barnabas and Saul in their first missionary journey. The apocalyptic was probably a John resident in Ephesus, but not the apostle. He gives a second reason for thinking so, as follows:

2. "From the ideas, and from the words and their arrangement, it may be reasonably conjectured that this one is different from that one. For the Gospel and the epistle agree with each other and begin in the same manner. The one says, 'In the beginning was the Word'; the other, 'That which was from the beginning.' The one: 'And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father'; the other says the same things slightly altered: 'Which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes; which we have looked upon and our hands have handled of the Word of life—and the life was manifested.' . . . John discusses everything under the same heads and names; some of which we will briefly mention. Anyone who examines carefully will find the phrases 'The life,' 'The light,' 'Turning from darkness,' frequently occurring in both; also continually, 'Truth,' 'Grace,' 'Joy,' 'The flesh and the blood of the Lord,' 'The judgment,' 'The forgiveness of sins,' 'The love of God toward us,' the commandment that we love one another, that we should keep all the commandments; the Conviction of the world, of the Devil, of the Antichrist, the Promise of the Holy Spirit, the Adoption of God, the Faith continually required of us, The Father and the Son, occur everywhere. In fact, it is plainly to be seen that one and the same charac-

ter marks the Gospel and the epistle throughout. But the Apocalypse is different from these writings and foreign to them; not touching, nor in the least bordering upon them; almost, so to speak, without even a syllable in common with them."⁷

We must agree that Dionysius is right as to the internal evidence binding the Gospel and the epistles together. His list of common phrases might be corrected and improved somewhat, but his general contention is good. We must agree, again, that the main contents of the Apocalypse are in striking contrast with the material found in the other writings of John, although the closing statement of Dionysius that they have scarcely a syllable in common surely is extravagant. On the contrary, a close study of these books will reveal the fact that together with their broad difference of subject matter there are many minor points of resemblance which suggest if they do not prove common authorship.

We will instance a few of these. (1) The Logos title for our Lord is found in the prologue of the Gospel, in the epistle, and in the Apocalypse; and in no other books of the New Testament.⁸ This most suggestive link between the Christian faith and the Alexandrian and the Greek philosophy seems to be peculiar to the writings of John. It is an indissoluble bond uniting his three books and distinguishing them from all others in the New Testament times.

(2) Again and again in the Apocalypse the victorious Jesus is called the Lamb. Nowhere else in the New Testament is this title given to the Saviour, except in the Gospel according to John, where he has recorded that the Baptist pointed out the Master to him in the beginning with the words, "Behold, the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world."⁹ John never forgot that text of the

⁷ *Op. cit.*, pp. 310, 311.

⁸ John 1. 1, 14; 1 John 1. 1; Rev. 19. 13.

⁹ John 1. 29.

sermon which brought him to Christ. To him Jesus always was the Lamb of God, taking away the sin of the world. In the Apocalypse it is the Lamb he sees from the beginning to the end of the book. Twenty-six times he mentions him in the twenty-two chapters.

He is the Lamb that was slain.¹⁰ The redeemed wash their robes and make them white in the blood of the Lamb.¹¹ The Lamb is on the throne.¹² In the New Jerusalem they need no sun, for the Lamb is the light thereof.¹³ The inhabitants of that city rejoice evermore; for, John writes, "Blessed are they that are bidden to the marriage supper of the Lamb."¹⁴ "The Lamb that is in the midst of the throne shall be their shepherd, and shall guide them unto fountains of waters of life."¹⁵ There are those who cry for the rocks to hide them from the wrath of the Lamb.¹⁶ For if they "war against the Lamb, the Lamb shall overcome them, for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings."¹⁷ John the Baptist had said, "Behold, the Lamb of God!" John the evangelist followed Jesus and saw him live the spotless life, and die on the cross; and then in apocalyptic vision he saw him at the head of heaven's hosts and sitting on heaven's throne; and to him Jesus was the Paschal Lamb, slain for sin, saving from sin. To him heaven's King was a warring, overcoming, purifying, illuminating Lamb on the throne. This title furnishes another link between the Apocalypse and the other writings of John.

(3) In the very beginning of the Apocalypse we read, "Every eye shall see him, and they that pierced him."¹⁸ The piercing of our Lord's side is recorded in only one of our Gospels and that is the fourth, written by John.¹⁹ The context of these two passages contains a quotation from the

¹⁰ Rev. 5. 12.

¹⁵ Rev. 7. 17.

¹¹ Rev. 7. 14.

¹⁶ Rev. 6. 16.

¹² Rev. 22. 3.

¹⁷ Rev. 17. 14.

¹³ Rev. 21. 23.

¹⁸ Rev. 1. 7.

¹⁴ Rev. 19. 9.

¹⁹ John 19. 34.

prophet Zechariah, and the two agree in the form of the quotation, although it is not the form of the Septuagint.

(4) The phrases, "keep my word," and "keep my sayings" are found in the fourth Gospel, the First Epistle, and the Apocalypse; and nowhere else in the New Testament.²⁰

We begin to see that the statement of Dionysius that these writings scarcely have a syllable in common is far from warranted by the facts. Any of these titles and phrases we have now instanced is like that colored strand woven into all the cordage used by the British government and peculiar to it, so that it can be identified as government property wherever it may be found. These words are peculiar to the usage of John and mark the books containing them as belonging to a common authorship.

We might give a long list of common phrases which are not absolutely peculiar to John, while they are characteristic of his usage.

(5) The remarkable Greek word for "true," ἀληθινός, is found in the Gospel nine times, in the epistle four times, and in the Apocalypse ten times; and only five times in all the other New Testament books.

(6) The thought of "overcoming" is found in the Johannine writings more frequently than in any other writings in the New Testament, and it is common to the Gospel, the epistle, and the Apocalypse.²¹

(7) The word "witness" is a favorite with John. He uses it more frequently than any other New Testament writer; and this frequency of use is as characteristic of the Apocalypse as of the Gospel and the epistle.

(8) In the Gospel we read, "If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink."²² In the Apocalypse we find

²⁰ John 8. 51, 52, 55; 14. 23, 24; 15. 20; 17. 6; 1 John 2. 5; Rev. 3. 8, 10; 22. 7, 9.

²¹ John 16. 33; 1 John 2. 13; 4. 4; 5. 4; Rev. 2. 7, 11; 3. 5; 12. 11; 21. 7.

²² John 7. 37.

the same invitation, "And he that is athirst let him come: he that will, let him take the water of life freely."²³

(9) Christ is the bridegroom in the Gospel, and he appears as the bridegroom again in the Apocalypse.²⁴

We need not extend this list farther, though it might be made much larger. The illustrations we have given will suffice to show that the stamp of the Johannine literature can be traced through the Apocalypse, although the book itself is so strangely different from any other of the Johannine books and any other book in the New Testament. We grant that Dionysius is right in his main contention. The books are radically unlike in their material of composition. We believe that the difference of subject is sufficient to account for this, and that with all their differences there are many traces of a common origin remaining.²⁵

Dionysius has a third reason for his belief in a difference of authorship which is not so easily disposed of. He says:

3. "It can be shown that the diction of the Gospel and the epistle differs from that of the Apocalypse. For they were written not only without error as regards the Greek language, but also with elegance in their expression, in their reasoning, and in their entire structure. They are far indeed from betraying any barbarism or solecism, or any vulgarism whatever. For the writer had, as it seems, both the requisites of discourse—that is, the gift of knowledge and the gift of expression—as the Lord had bestowed them both upon him. I do not deny that the other writer saw a revelation and received knowledge and prophecy. I perceive, however, that his dialect and language are not ac-

²³ Rev. 22. 17.

²⁴ John 3. 29; Rev. 19. 7; 21. 2; 22. 17.

²⁵ The Tübingen school called the fourth Gospel "a spiritualized Apocalypse," in so far acknowledging a relationship between them. Harnack concludes that the relationship is that of common authorship. "I confess my adhesion to the critical heresy which carries back the Apocalypse and the Gospel to a single author" (*Chronologie der altchristlichen Litteratur*, p. 675).

curate Greek, but that he uses barbarous idioms, and, in some places, solecisms. It is unnecessary to point these out here, for I would not have any one think that I have said these things in a spirit of ridicule, for I have said what I have only with the purpose of showing clearly the difference between the writings.”²⁶

It is impossible not to admire the spirit in which Dionysius makes his criticisms. He agrees that the book is written by a man whose name was John, and that this John was a holy and inspired man. He is led by his study to conclude that this John was not the apostle John, and his reasons are given clearly, and they seem almost conclusive at first glance. They were sufficient to satisfy him; and in all probability this last reason was the climaxing reason in his mind. He wrote in Greek himself, and he was so familiar with the language and its uses that he could not believe that one and the same man could have written the comparatively faultless Greek of the Gospel and the epistle and at the same time have been guilty of publishing to the world the barbarous Greek of the Apocalypse.

The Greek of the Apocalypse is the worst Greek in the New Testament, and that is saying a great deal for it. Some of its constructions seem impossible and inexcusable. The nominative is put for the accusative and the accusative for the nominative.²⁷ There are impossible cases in apposition. The author seems to be anxious to get away from the oblique cases and back to the nominative again. Of course most of these grammatical blunders are obscured in the English translation or corrected outright into smooth flowing constructions; but in the Greek they stand as pure barbarisms, as Dionysius said. It also is true that in this respect the style of the Apocalypse is not like that of the other writings of John.

²⁶ *Op. cit.*, p. 311.

²⁷ Rev. 7. 9; 20. 2.

Suppose, as an example of the uncouthness of the grammar in the Greek, we should attempt to translate into somewhat corresponding English the very first sentences of greeting. They might be fairly represented grammatically by the following: "John to the seven churches in Asia: Grace to you and peace *from he being and from he was* and *from he coming*; and from the seven spirits which are before his throne; and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness (a nominative in apposition with a genitive. We do not know how to represent such a solecism in English), the first born of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth (two more nominatives and all in apposition with the genitive preceding). To the one loving us (present participle), and having loosed us (aorist participle) from our sins in his blood, and *to the one he made us* a kingdom (an aorist indicative introduced along with the participial construction), priests to God and his Father, to him be the glory and the power to the æons. Amen."²⁸

If the John who wrote the Gospel and the epistles was, as Dionysius said, not only without error in his use of the Greek language but also with elegance in his expression, anyone at home in the use of this tongue naturally would raise the question how it could be possible for the same man to write in such crudities and irregularities of style. The author of the other Johannine books writes in easy and flowing style and is observant of all the rules of syntax. The writer of the Apocalypse, as it would seem almost consciously and surely continually, bids defiance to all rules of grammar. His genders and numbers and cases and tenses are all faulty on occasion. How is this difference to be explained? We do not know.

Three reasons have been suggested for the poor grammar of the Apocalypse: (1) The usual escape from the recognized difference in the use of Greek in the Apocalypse and

²⁸ Rev. I. 4, 5, 6.

in the Gospel and the problem which it raised has been found in the different dates of their composition. We have been told that the Apocalypse was written fifteen, twenty, or thirty years before the epistles or the Gospel and that John at that time was not the master of the Greek language which he became in after years. In his long residence in Ephesus he acquired much in many ways, and it was only to be expected that his knowledge of the Greek was being improved all the while. He wrote poor Greek when he wrote the Apocalypse and he wrote better Greek when he composed the Gospel in later life. One objection to this explanation of the facts is that critics are not now disposed to put so long a period of time between the two books as they once were; and if the passage of time is the only solution, that solution of the problem fails when the time becomes too short for the change to take place. Another objection is that some of these grammatical blunders do not seem to be the result of ignorance so much as the deliberate perpetration of one who knew better grammar, but chose these uncouth forms to be in harmony with some of his uncouth visions.

(2) Archbishop Benson has written an elaborate defense of the ungrammatical grammar of the Apocalypse. He thinks that possibly in every instance the apocalyptic had a definite reason for his departure from the beaten paths of composition. When in eighteen passages he uses *δμοιος* with the dative, that proves that he knows how to use it correctly. If, then, in two instances we find that he has used *δμοιος* with the accusative, we have no right to charge him with ignorance of the correct usage. We ought, rather, to inquire what reason he has for departing from the common and correct usage at these points. Zahn is very much convinced of this necessity. He says, "When a writer who uses *ἀπό* with the genitive between thirty and forty times, writes once *ἀπὸ ὁ ὄν καὶ ὁ ἡν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος*, it must be because he wants to indicate that *ὁ ὄν κτλ.* is used as an indeclinable proper

name, as a paraphrase for Yahweh."²⁹ This position is taken again and again in Robertson's new Grammar of New Testament Greek. Then, 'visions are apt to be disjointed and illogical; why may not the author of the Apocalypse have chosen this irregular grammar to preserve an impression of the irregularity of the original revelation? There may be something in these suggestions, but how much no one ever will be able to tell; and it is extremely difficult to apply the suggestion to the explanation of certain individual cases in any satisfying manner.

(3) Some have thought that John employed different amanuenses and the differences of style could be accounted for on that ground. One scribe wrote Greek poorly; and John had the assistance of a better man in his further writing. This is pure conjecture. There may be something in it, but no one knows. We feel sure on other grounds that the apostle John wrote both the Apocalypse and the other Johannine books, and we simply refuse to be shaken in that conviction by this strange dissimilarity of grammar. The proofs for common authorship are so convincing that we are willing to allow this difference in the use of the language to remain a mystery for which we may offer some possible explanations, but the key for the solution of which has been lost with the generation in which John lived.

We already have pointed out the similarities of titles, thought, and phraseology which bind the Gospel and the Apocalypse together. It would be equally easy to show that the underlying theology of the two books is the same. There are differences in the setting and emphasis and expression of this theology, but they are such differences as would be inevitable in books treating of such different themes and belonging to such different departments of literature.

The personality apparent in all these Johannine writings is one and the same. The Apocalypse is the book of a

²⁹ Zahn, Introduction, vol. iii, p. 435.

Boanerges. It seethes with fiery hot indignation against all the enemies of the Christ and his cause. Are there Jews in Smyrna and in Philadelphia who have antagonized the Christian Church in those cities? What shall we call them? They are blasphemers and liars; they are a synagogue of Satan, John says.³⁰ Has the power of the Roman empire been prostituted to the persecution of the adherents of the Christian faith? What shall we call it? It is "BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF THE HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH," John says.³¹ Has the Roman emperor set up his altars everywhere and demanded that he himself be worshiped as divine and defied all other religious powers to wage war with him and his followers? What shall we call him? He is no God, John says; he is a monster, a beast.³²

What will the Christ do with these hostile powers, now that he has been exalted to the throne? Let the heavens be opened and John will show us the King of kings and Lord of lords, and this is the vision he sees. "Out of his mouth proceedeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness of the wrath of God, the Almighty."³³ What will the enemies of the Lord do then? They will say to the mountains and to the rocks, "Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: for the great day of their wrath is come; and who is able to stand?"³⁴ Only a Boanerges could receive and transmit a revelation like that.

There are numerous indications of the loving disciple and saintly soul who delights in fellowship with the Father and with his Son above all other things. That is his conception of eternal blessedness. "They shall hunger no more, neither

³⁰ Rev. 2. 9; 3. 9.

³³ Rev. 19. 15.

³¹ Rev. 17. 5.

³⁴ Rev. 6. 16, 17.

³² Rev. 13. 1-4.

thirst any more; for the Lamb that is in the midst of the throne shall be their shepherd, and shall guide them unto fountains of waters of life: and God shall wipe away every tear from their eyes.”³⁵ “And I heard a great voice out of the throne saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he shall dwell with them, and they shall be his peoples, and God himself shall be with them, *and be* their God. . . . He that overcometh shall inherit these things. But for the fearful, and the unbelieving, and abominable, and murderers, and fornicators, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, their part *shall be* in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone.”³⁶

Therein is the paradox of John’s character apparent. He loves with an intensity of affection which cannot brook any antagonism to the object of his regard. He is one who, like Dante in Browning’s description,

loved well because he hated,
Hated wickedness that hinders loving.³⁷

The fulfillment of his joy is in fellowship with the Father and with the Son. He sees fire fall from heaven upon those who refuse to love and serve them.³⁸ This is the John of the Gospels and the epistles. He displays the same strange mixture of sternness and gentleness, of hate and love, of vehemence and diffidence in all these books.

We cannot believe that any other John would have these characteristics in like measure, and would be of such authority in the early church that he would need no other introduction and guarantee at the opening of his book and at the close of his visions than the mere mention of his name would give, and then that he would be utterly lost to sight in the subsequent history! Yet that is what the deniers of the apostolic authorship of the Apocalypse would have us conclude. Some of them think that an unknown

³⁵ Rev. 7. 16, 17.

³⁶ Rev. 21. 3, 7, 8.

³⁷ Browning, One Word More, v.

³⁸ Rev. 8. 7-11.

John wrote the Apocalypse, and some of them think that an unknown John wrote the fourth Gospel, and some others think that an unknown John wrote both the Gospel and the Apocalypse; and yet, although he thus proved himself to be the supreme literary genius of the first Christian century, all record and all memory of him perished from among men, while the church in some strange and unaccountable fashion came to believe that his books were written by another man! Let those believe that who can.

We prefer to agree that the tradition of the church is the best authority in the matter, and that this greatest of the New Testament seers and theologians is that apostle of the loving heart who lay upon the Master's bosom at the daily meal and came to have the deepest insight into the Master's mind during the life ministry, and then was granted the revelation of the Master's ultimate triumph in the visions of the Patmos exile. We turn now to a review of the tradition of the ancient church and the criticism of the modern church concerning the canonicity and the authorship of the Apocalypse.

II. THE EXTERNAL EVIDENCE

I. The Earliest Tradition. (1) Justin Martyr lived and wrote in the earlier half of the second century. He had traveled extensively. He was a native of Palestine. He had visited the churches of Alexandria and Rome, as well as those in Asia Minor. He knew the universal tradition of the church in his generation. He gives us his testimony on the very spot where the Johannine books were composed. He believed what the church in Ephesus and all the churches of Asia Minor believed concerning them. He knew what the African and the European churches as well as those in Asia said about the Apocalypse, and he writes in so many words, "There was a certain man with us, whose name was John, one of the apostles of Christ, who proph-

esied, by a revelation that was made to him, that those who believed in our Christ would dwell a thousand years in Jerusalem."³⁹ The reference is to Rev. 20. 4, and the statement could not be more explicit that this book was written by John the apostle, and no more authoritative witness could be cited from this period. Such definite testimony from such a source ought to be as unquestioned as it is unquestionable.

(2) Melito was bishop of the church in Sardis about A. D. 170, and he wrote a commentary on the Apocalypse of John. Sardis was the site of one of the churches addressed in the epistles of the opening chapters of the Apocalypse. The tradition here would be likely to be an unbroken and an authoritative one.

(3) Theophilus of Antioch and Apollonius of Ephesus, also before the close of the second century, quote from the Apocalypse as the writing of John. All these witnesses are from Asia Minor where the Apocalypse was composed, and where the tradition concerning it would be most likely to be reliable.

(4) Irenæus was a disciple of Polycarp, who was a disciple of the apostle John. Irenæus himself came from Asia Minor and was bishop of the church in Lyons in the latter part of the second century. He speaks of the "most approved and ancient copies" of the Apocalypse, and he appeals to the testimony of "those men who saw John face to face" concerning its text.⁴⁰ We know that Irenæus meant John the apostle in this reference because he tells us explicitly in another passage that John could not endure the sight of some of the Apocalyptic revelation, "and the Word revived him, and reminded him that it was He upon whose bosom he had leaned at supper, when he put the question as to who should betray Him, declaring, I am the

³⁹ Dialogue with Trypho, ch. 81. Ante-Nicene Fathers, vol. i, p. 240.

⁴⁰ Ag. Heresies, V, 30. 1; Ante-Nicene Fathers, vol. i, p. 558.

first and the last, and He who liveth, and was dead, and behold I am alive for evermore, and have the keys of death and of hell, i. 17, 18.”⁴¹

(5) Tertullian was the great leader in the African church in this period, and in his writings we find such explicit statements as these, “The apostle John, in the Apocalypse, describes a sword which proceeded from the mouth of God,”⁴² and “The apostle John beheld a city in heaven.”⁴³

(6) Clement of Alexandria was a contemporary of Tertullian and Irenæus and he cites the Apocalypse of John as sacred and authoritative Scripture, even as they did.

(7) Origen, who succeeded Clement as the head of the catechetical school at Alexandria and became the greatest of all the church Fathers in saintly life and preeminent scholarship, is as clear in his conviction as any who had preceded him. He says, “John, son of Zebedee, says in his Apocalypse, And I saw an angel flying in the midst of heaven having the Eternal Gospel, to preach it to those who dwell upon the earth, 14. 6, 7.”⁴⁴

(8) The Muratorian Canon, A. D. 170, says, “John, too, in the Apocalypse, although he writes only to seven churches, yet addresses all.” The John who wrote the Apocalypse is not distinguished in any way from the author of the Gospel and the epistle, and the failure to distinguish is probably an identification. It would seem that the writer of this Fragment believed that one John, the apostle, wrote all these books.

(9) Hippolytus, A. D. 200-240, wrote an elaborate defense of the Apocalypse against its chief critic in his day, and his book seems to have established the apostolic and canonical authority of the Apocalypse in all the Western church for the succeeding centuries.

⁴¹ *Op. cit.*, iv, 20. 11; Ante-Nicene Fathers, vol. i, p. 491.

⁴² Ag. Marcion, III, 14; Ante-Nicene Fathers, vol. iii, p. 333.

⁴³ *Op. cit.*, iii, 25; Ante-Nicene Fathers, p. 342.

⁴⁴ Commentary on John, I, 14; Ante-Nicene Fathers, vol. ix, p. 305.

There are few books in the New Testament which are as well attested and as widely acknowledged in the second Christian century as is the Apocalypse of John; and the Tübingen School is right in declaring that its apostolic authorship is as well guaranteed as that of any book in the New Testament canon in all the writings of Christian antiquity. Samuel Davidson said: "The apostolic origin of the Apocalypse is as well attested as that of any book in the New Testament. How can it be proved that Paul wrote the Epistle to the Galatians, for example, on the basis of external evidence, if it be denied that the apostle John wrote the closing book of the canon? With the limited stock of early ecclesiastical literature that survives the wreck of time, we should despair of proving the authenticity of any New Testament book if that of the Apocalypse be rejected."⁴⁵ However, there were a few who denied the authority of the apostle, and we notice these at this point.

2. The First Opponents. (1) Epiphanius mentions some people whom he calls the Alogi, who declared that the fourth Gospel and the Apocalypse were to be rejected from the canon of Scripture because they were written not by the apostle John but by his enemy and the enemy of the truth he taught, Cerinthus, the arch-heretic of Ephesus! The perversity of this view is equal to that of Thomas Paine's indictment of George Washington when he declared that Washington's military blunders had nearly ruined the country and that posterity always would be in doubt as to whether Washington was more of a fool or a knave. The character of Washington never was injured by such criticism. If Cerinthus wrote the Johannine books, then we can believe that Thomas Paine was a greater patriot than George Washington; but until the one absurdity is proven we will refuse credence to the other. Nobody knows anything about these Alogi. They are merely men-

⁴⁵ Introduction to the Study of the New Testament, vol. i, p. 345.

tioned by Epiphanius and he tells us nothing of their numbers or their standing in the church. They possibly were a mere handful of folk, capable of any perversity of faith. They do not seem to have had any influence or following in the next generation.

(2) Caius, a presbyter at Rome, did not belong to the Alogi, but he adopted their view of the authorship of the Apocalypse, and he used some of their arguments against the book. It was in answer to him that Hippolytus wrote the defense of the Apocalypse which established its standing in the Western church.

(3) We already have mentioned Dionysius of Alexandria and his objections to the apostolic authorship of the Apocalypse drawn from the internal characteristics of the book. We have answered his objections in a manner satisfactory to ourselves. At the same time we acknowledged that the criticism of Dionysius was both courteous and scholarly; and we felt sure that Dionysius himself was a most worthy and honest man. His reasoning seems to have influenced much of the later thought in the East.

(4) Eusebius evidently is uncertain whether to say that the Apocalypse was written by the apostle John or by the presbyter John, and he is just as undecided whether to class the book among the Accepted or among the Rejected claimants to a place in the New Testament canon.⁴⁶

(5) A little later Cyril of Jerusalem omitted the Apocalypse from his list of canonical books. The canon of the Synod of Laodicea, A. D. 363, did not give it a place. It is not found in the canon of the Apostolic Constitutions. Gregory of Nazianzus omitted it from his canon; and it is not found in the Synopsis of Chrysostom.

(6) The school at Antioch does not seem to have favored the use of the Apocalypse. Neither Theodore nor Chrysostom nor Theodoret quotes it in his writings, and it is known that Theodoret rejected it.

⁴⁶ Church History, iii, 39; iii, 25. 4.

(7) Amphilochius of Iconium, who died about A. D. 395, says that the majority of men in his day believed that the Apocalypse was spurious; and even as late as the beginning of the ninth century Nicephorus ranks the Apocalypse of John along with the Apocalypse of Peter among the books which are spoken against and doubtful as to their canonicity.

(8) The Jacobite church rejected it. The Nestorian church refused it. It was not in ecclesiastical use in any of the Syrian churches for the first four centuries. It did not have any place in the Syrian New Testament, the Peshito, in this period.

(9) The first commentary on the Apocalypse in the Eastern church was written by Andreas in the fifth century; and the second was written by Arethas in the ninth century. In all probability the Apocalypse was written in Asia Minor and received there from the first, and from Asia Minor it was carried westward to Africa and to Europe; but it does not seem to have penetrated the farther East, and for some centuries it was comparatively unknown in the churches of those regions. The Eastern church was disposed to refuse recognition to the Apocalypse in the beginning; but the Western church came to an established faith in its apostolicity and canonicity, and in due time the Eastern church received it into its canon. The Apocalypse held an undisputed place in the Bible through the Middle Ages and until the time of the Reformation. Then doubts concerning it were expressed again.

3. At the Reformation. (1) Carlstadt divided the books of the New Testament into three classes of different degrees of authority, and he put seven books into the third or least authoritative class, and he put the Apocalypse at the very end of these, as the least worthy book of the New Testament and almost liable to exclusion altogether. (2) Luther practically excluded the Apocalypse from his Bible. He translated it, but put it into the appendix as one of the non-

canonical and apocryphal books. "My spirit cannot adapt itself to the book," he said. In his Preface to the New Testament, 1522, he declared that to him the Apocalypse had every mark of being neither apostolic nor prophetic. The apostles spoke clearly, without figure or vision, of Christ and his deeds; and no prophet deals so entirely with visions and figures. It did not seem to be the work of the Holy Spirit. He did not like the commands and threats which the writer makes about his book, and the promise of blessedness to those who keep what was written in it, when no one knows what that is, to say nothing of keeping it, and there are many nobler books to be kept.⁴⁷

(3) Zwingli thought that the Apocalypse was a non-biblical book, written by some other John than the apostle.

(4) Calvin did not write any commentaries on Second and Third John and the Apocalypse. However, he used the Apocalypse in quotation as apostolic and canonical.

(5) Melanchthon had no question about the book. Beza defended it against all criticism. Bullinger answered all the objections of Luther concerning it. So the scholars and leaders of the Reformation had different judgments about the Apocalypse; and although at the very beginning Erasmus and Luther and Zwingli turned the tide against it, it was not long until the church had restored the book to its place in the canon and in the regard and the affection of its membership.

4. In Later Times. Herder and Eichhorn led the church into a much fuller appreciation of the literary value of the Apocalypse. At the beginning of the last century Schleiermacher and his school renewed the assault upon the book. In the middle of the century the Tübingen School warmly defended its authenticity. Through the whole century of historical criticism just past there have been advocates of all the old views concerning it. The final outcome, however, seems to be manifest in a tendency to recognize the

⁴⁷ Summary in Hastings's Bible Dictionary, vol. iv, p. 241.

unusual weight of testimony in its favor in the second century and, in a fuller appreciation of the nature of the literature it represents, to find an explanation of many of the difficulties felt by the older scholars concerning it. The Johannine authorship is ably maintained by scholars differing so widely from each other as E. A. Abbott, C. A. Scott, W. H. Simcox, V. H. Stanton, Bernhard Weiss, and Theodore Zahn. Origen, Hippolytus, the Muratorian Canon, Irenæus, Clement of Alexandria, and Tertullian cite the Gospel, the epistles, and the Apocalypse as the work of one person, John; and we have now seen reason for concluding that the apostle John is the author of all these books. Those who attack the Johannine and apostolic authorship of any one of them must give good reason for setting aside these chief authorities in the field of original patristic evidence. These names are sufficient to settle the question as to the Johannine authorship of all the Johannine books.

The Apocalypse probably is more firmly grounded in the respect of the general church to-day than it ever has been since the first half of the second century. It doubtless will hold its own henceforth against all hostile criticism. It is a revelation of Jesus Christ, a strange, elusive, alluring revelation. As the successive centuries unfold its mysteries and as its interpretation becomes more and more clear it will be increasingly prized by the increasingly appreciative church. There has been almost as much disputing about the date of the writing of the Apocalypse as there has been about its authorship. We will summarize the facts as briefly as possible.

III. THE DATE

I. In the case of the Apocalypse many modern scholars both of the ultra-critical and the more conservative school have been disposed to date the book much earlier than church tradition does. The same critics who would put the composition of the fourth Gospel toward the end of

the second century, a whole century later than church tradition placed it in ascribing it to the apostle John, when they came to dating the Apocalypse decided that it must have been written not at the end of the first century, as church tradition declared, but at least a whole generation earlier than that. The internal evidence was of such a character as to lead many conservative scholars to agree with them in fixing upon this earlier date. This case probably is unique in the field of New Testament criticism. In the case of every other book if the traditional date was not accepted, the tendency always has been to bring it down to some later time.

2. The external evidence for the late date of the Apocalypse is stronger than for any other book in the New Testament. Irenæus, in speaking of the Apocalypse, says, "It was seen not long ago, but almost in our own generation, at the end of the reign of Domitian."⁴⁸ Eusebius declares, "At that time the apostle and evangelist John, the one whom Jesus loved, was still living in Asia, and governing the churches of that region, having returned after the death of Domitian from his exile on the island."⁴⁹ Victorinus agrees in the same testimony, "When John saw these things he was in the island of Patmos, having been condemned to the mines by the emperor Domitian."⁵⁰ He repeats this testimony in other passages.

Jerome closes his account of the apostle John with these words: "Domitian having raised a second persecution, he was banished to the isle of Patmos, and wrote the Apocalypse, on which Justin Martyr and Irenæus afterward wrote commentaries. But Domitian having been put to death, and his acts, on account of his excessive cruelty, having been annulled by the Senate, he returned to Ephesus under Pertius."

⁴⁸ Quoted by Eusebius, *op. cit.*, iii, 18. 3; Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, vol. i, p. 148.

⁴⁹ *Op. cit.*, iii, 23. 1; Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, vol. i, p. 150.

⁵⁰ In Apoc., X, 11,

nax, and continuing there until the time of the emperor Trajan, founded and built churches throughout all Asia, and, worn out by old age, died in the sixty-eighth year after our Lord's passion and was buried near the same city."⁵¹ Here are the ancient authorities. No one contradicts them in the first three centuries of church history. They all agree that the Apocalypse was written during the reign of Domitian, some time in the last decade of the first century. Can there be any good reason for contradicting a tradition guaranteed by such names and by such unanimity? The cavalier method in which some modern writers set it aside seems to argue its unfitness to agree with their theories rather than its own untrustworthiness.

3. The following authorities thought that the Apocalypse was written in or about the reign of Nero, A. D. 65-69: Credner, Ewald, Hase, Reuss, Baur, Hilgenfeld, Wieseler, Beyschlag, Lange, Stuart, Selwyn, Farrar, Lightfoot, Westcott, Hort, and Henderson.

4. The following authorities date the composition of the Apocalypse about the year A. D. 70, or in the beginning of the reign of Vespasian: Eichhorn, Lücke, Bleek, Düsterdieck, Weiss, Mommsen, Bartlet.

5. The present tendency is to go back to the date set by Irenæus and the other church Fathers, somewhere between A. D. 90 and 96, in the reign of Domitian. This was the view of Elliott, Ebrard, Hengstenberg, Hofmann, Godet, Lee, Milligan, Warfield, Abbott, Arnold, Cornely, Adeney, Belser, Bousset, Forbes, Gloag, Green, Havet, Hug, Jülicher, Kreyenbühl, McGiffert, Mill, Neumann, Peake, Ramsay, Réville, Salmon, Schäfer, Von Dobschutz, Von Soden, Weizsäcker, Wellhausen, Wernle, Zahn, Davidson, Alford, and Trench. It is the view of Harnack and Bacon. It is the conclusion of Porter in the article on the Apocalypse in Hastings's Bible Dictionary. It is the date

⁵¹ Lives of Illustrious Men, ch. 9; Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, vol. iii, pp. 364, 365.

favored by Swete in the latest critical commentary on the book.

If we agree upon this date as the only one supported by ancient authority and satisfying all the demands of the most exacting modern criticism, it leaves the problem of the differences of grammar and Greek in the writing of the Gospel and of the Apocalypse looming large on our hands; for these two books must then have been written within a short period of time. They both must belong to the last decade of the century, and any difference in vocabulary, grammar, doctrine, spirit, or form cannot be accounted for by any lapse of time between the two. It must be due either to a different amanuensis or to the inherent difference in the class of literature represented by the two books. The Gospel is a biography and history. The book of Revelation is an Apocalypse. The prophetic literature of the Jews is unique in the literature of the nations. The apocalyptic literature is the lineal successor of the Old Testament prophetic literature, and it in turn is unique, with characteristics distinguishing it from the prophets and from all other literature in the world.

It is but recently that the fact has been recognized that the Apocalypse of John belongs to a class of literature and does not stand alone in its period of world history as it does in our New Testament. There are a number of other Apocalypses in existence in whole or in part which belong to the same period of development in Hebrew history, and the study of these has been very helpful in the understanding and interpretation of our New Testament book.

IV. GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE APOCALYPTICAL LITERATURE

There are Christian Apocalypses belonging to a later period than that of John and modeled largely upon his

work. We are not interested so much in these at present, but, rather, in those Jewish Apocalypses which preceded him or belonged to the same period with him and with which he must have been acquainted when he wrote his book. The Jewish Apocalypses have several characteristics in common, and we will specify a few of them.

1. They all belong to the period of persecution and national depression. They have been called Tracts for Bad Times. The enemies of the Lord for the time being seem triumphant. The voice of prophecy is dumb. No man stands forth to proclaim in public the will of the Lord. No authorized messenger declares, "Thus saith Jehovah." In some secluded corner a scribe meditates upon the evil times and the mysteries of Divine Providence and the problems of unfulfilled prophecy; and to him visions of a brighter future are granted. He is given to see that though the present may be dark enough, the future holds ultimate triumph in store. It may not come very soon, and it may not come in this world; but in the world which is to follow this the righteous will find their adequate reward and the wicked will be overthrown. There will be a new heaven and a new earth and a new and blessed consummation of things.

This assurance was given to faith, but it was given in visions, and symbols, and dreams. Dreams come only in dark days or at night. Apocalypses belong only to troubled times. Symbols are employed only when clear speech has failed. When the prophet has ceased to speak, the apocalyptic begins to write. He works upon the basis which prophetic material has furnished him, and he remodels it into grotesque and curious forms. He must have been conscious that there was a difference in the degree of his inspiration, for he never publishes his visions under his own name or claims for them his personal authority, as the prophets did.

2. Pseudonymous Authorship. It is a strange fact that

all of these Jewish Apocalypses, written after the age of the prophets in Israel, take shelter behind some one of the great names of Jewish antiquity, Enoch, Moses, Isaiah, Baruch, or Ezra, and thus conceal the real author's name. We know nothing at all about the authors of any of them to-day. We can decide approximately the date of their composition, and we know that they all have been written in the later age of Jewish history; but we find the names of older heroes and leaders and saints attached to them and they purport to give the revelations and the visions granted to these. They are all works of fiction to that extent.

The reason for this pseudonymous authorship may be found in the fact that it might have been dangerous to the life or the liberty of the writer of any one of these half-political pamphlets if he became known to the authorities. The Apocalypses all foretold calamity to the world powers. They all predicted a coming catastrophe and revolution. They proclaimed the overthrow of the present order of things. They antagonized the heathen religions and the heathen regimes. It probably was the part of prudence for the author to hide his own personality.

Without doubt too the later writers felt that they were in line with the spirit and the teachings of the older worthies whose names they chose to give authority to their books. If these revelations were not given actually to these men, they would have sanctioned them in both their purpose and their content if they had been alive when these books were composed. We are assured by the writers on the subject that this assumption of an ancient name by a contemporary writer was a common literary device at this time, and that there was not the same sense of literary proprietorship then that we have now, and that this custom was considered legitimate and thoroughly consistent with honesty and the highest moral ideals. It is difficult for us to conceive this; but it is true that the standards in the

ancient times were different from those to which we are accustomed. These Apocalypses evidently were written by religious men for religious purposes, and nevertheless under assumed names.

3. The purpose of writing seems to have been the same in all the books of this class of literature. Encouragement under trial and persecution, and exhortation to patience in the present distress—these are the two burdens in them all; and both encouragement and exhortation are based upon predictions of the coming crisis and the ultimate triumph of Jehovah in behalf of his people.

4. The form in which these predictions are clothed is practically the same in all the Apocalypses. Visions and dreams are vouchsafed to the writer and these visions have all the grotesqueness and the irregularity of our own inventions in troubled sleep. The unexpected always is happening. The most surprising and sudden changes take place. Unnatural and impossible combinations of incidents and things occur. We could make nothing out of them, if they were not interpreted for us. In the Apocalypses an angel furnishes the interpretation and these strange and mysterious and kaleidoscopic pictures are found to be symbols of present and future events.

5. The material of which these apocalyptic symbols are composed is in large measure common to all. Hideous creatures, whose appearance is distressing to the artistic mind and whose only excuse for being is that they are the creations of a dream, represent the world kingdoms. The successive kings in a nation or in a dynasty are the many heads of a beast. Certain numbers stand for individuals or for conventional periods or for the antichrist. There are theophanies and wars and dragons and descriptions of heaven and hell. It is surprising to find how much these books resemble each other in their constituent and conventional framework and composition. They rest upon the same portions of the Old Testament as the sources of

their inspiration, and the originality of each writer is apparent only in the differences of combination in this material.

6. It has been thought that some distinctive doctrines might be predicated of these Apocalypses. (1) Their conception of God seems to be more transcendent than that of the Old Testament. The God of the Apocalypses is more sharply distinguished from the ruler of this world darkness. The separation is almost dualistic in its completeness. God stands outside and above the present world-order, and he is about to intervene to set it right and vindicate his power and establish his own authority.

(2) In the Apocalypses there is a wider world-view than is common in the Old Testament. The kingdom of God is no longer the kingdom of Israel alone; it is extended to include all the kingdoms of the world.

(3) The eschatology of the Apocalypses is much more definite than that of the Old Testament. The hope of immortality shines only dimly in the pages of the older book; but it comes out into the clear light in the apocalyptic literature. The general scheme of the last things appears to be the same in all of them. There is to be a final assault of the powers of evil upon the righteous and their King, but they are to be completely vanquished. Some great crisis is at hand, but out of its culmination of catastrophe for the wicked a new order of things will arise. There will be a Judgment Day, and the good will be gathered from out their great tribulation to their eternal blessedness in the presence of Jehovah, their glorious King.

These six things seem to be true of all of the Jewish Apocalypses. They are all of pseudonymous authorship. They spring out of similar circumstances. They have a like purpose. They have much the same form and much of the same material. They represent the same general type of doctrines. It may be worth our while to glance at a few of these Apocalypses which preceded the publication of the Apocalypse of John.

V. THE JEWISH APOCALYPSES

All of these have come to us through Christian hands, and some of them have been revised rather radically for the use and the reading of Christians. Some have been changed more than others, and sometimes it is difficult to determine how much of a book is Jewish and how much of it is due to Christian editors and revisers.

1. The Book of Enoch. This book seems to have been esteemed very highly by both the Jews and the Christians of the first century. It is quoted by name in the Epistle of Jude in our New Testament, and by the Epistle of Barnabas which belongs to the apostolic age. Tertullian thought it was an inspired book. He says, "These things the Holy Spirit, foreseeing from the beginning the entrance of superstition, foretold by the mouth of Enoch." Irenæus refers to it as an authority. Clement of Alexandria and Origen knew it, and refer to it in their writings. The Jews were the first to decide that the book was not authoritative, and the Christians came more slowly to the same conclusion.

Augustine says: "There is some truth in these apocryphal writings, but they contain so many false statements that they have no canonical authority. We cannot deny that Enoch, the seventh from Adam, left some divine writings, for this is asserted by the apostle Jude in his canonical epistle. But it is not without reason that these writings have no place in that canon of Scripture which was preserved in the temple of the Hebrew people by the diligence of successive priests; for their antiquity brought them under suspicion, and it was impossible to ascertain whether these were his genuine writings, and they were not brought forward as genuine by the persons who were found to have carefully preserved the canonical books by a successive transmission."⁵² Augustine evidently is misled by the

⁵² De Civit., XV, 23; Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series, vol. ii, p. 305.

pseudonym, but is content to abide by the Jewish canon as comprising the only genuine Jewish Scripture.

When the Book of Enoch thus had fallen into disrepute among both the Jews and the Christians it disappeared from sight. All copies seemed to have been lost or destroyed. All that the Middle Ages or the more modern times knew of it was to be found in the references to it in Jude and in the writings of the church Fathers. In the year 1773 the African explorer Bruce found an Ethiopic version in the Ethiopic Bible in Abyssinia. He brought three copies back to Europe with him, and thus this book, which had been lost for a thousand years, came again into the possession of Christian scholars. It was found to contain the words quoted by Jude.

It is written in the name of Enoch and purports to give a series of visions granted to him. Under the guidance of an angel Enoch travels through heaven and hell and has many mysteries explained to him. All the coming history of Israel is shown to him under the form of a series of conflicts between various animals. All time is divided into Ten Weeks, in the first of which Enoch himself was living, in the ninth of which would be the general judgment, and the tenth of which would introduce the final blessedness. The inscription to the book itself states that Moses in his one hundred and twentieth year handed it to Joshua with the Pentateuch; but all modern scholars agree that it must have been written some time in the second or the first century B. C., while some even put its date into the beginning years of the first Christian century.

A recent commentator upon the Apocalypse thus appraises the book: "It is quite plain that this apocalypse either exerted a considerable influence on the generations immediately before and contemporary with Jesus, or at least reflects a large number of ideas which were in the minds of men of these generations, and are not accounted for by the Old Testament. Such, for example, is the de-

veloped doctrine of Angels which meets us at the very outset of the New Testament, the developed doctrine of the Resurrection, and of the Day of Judgment. It is very significant too that no fewer than four titles of the Messiah are used for the first time of a personal Messiah in this Book of Enoch: Christ or the Anointed One; the Righteous One; the Elect or Chosen One; and the Son of Man. And in our Lord's own words, 'when the Son of man shall sit on the throne of his glory,' there is an echo, it may be a deliberate quotation, of the words of this book."⁵³ Jude was the brother of our Lord; and he knew and quoted the Book of Enoch. It would seem altogether likely that Jesus had read it and he may have quoted from it too.

Mr. Charles, who is a leading authority upon this apocalyptic literature, thinks that phrases, clauses, or thoughts derived from the Book of Enoch are to be found not only in the Epistle of Jude and in the Apocalypse of John, but also in the Gospels according to John and Matthew and Luke, and in the book of Acts, and in the Epistles of Paul to the Romans and to the Ephesians, and in the Epistle to the Hebrews.⁵⁴ If he is right in this conclusion, the influence of the Book of Enoch is to be traced through nearly the whole of our New Testament; and it furnishes a model and some of the material of John's Apocalypse. Jesus and Jude and John must have had considerable respect for this revelation, and they probably considered it a genuine work of the patriarch Enoch himself.

2. In the Epistle of Jude we read that Michael contended with the devil about the body of Moses.⁵⁵ The Old Testament tells us nothing about this. Where did Jude read about it? Origen and Didymus and Apollinaris of Laodicea all vouch for the fact that Jude is referring to an account given in another of the Jewish Apocalypses, The Assump-

⁵³ C. Anderson Scott, *The New Century Bible, Revelation*, p. 16.

⁵⁴ *Op. cit.*, note, p. 16.

⁵⁵ Jude 9.

tion of Moses. Not much is known about this book, for it seems almost entirely to have perished. Nicephorus includes it in his stichometry, and he gives it fourteen hundred stichoi, which would make it a book about the size of the Apocalypse of John. In 1861 a fragment of the book was discovered in a Latin version in the Ambrosian Library at Milan. On the basis of the estimated size given by Nicephorus, we conclude that this fragment represents about one third of the original work. It does not include the closing portion, and therefore it does not have the incident referred to by Jude; and we are still dependent upon the authority of the church Fathers for believing that Jude quotes from this source. The fragment shows, however, that this work belongs to the Apocalypses. It is supposed to be addressed to Joshua by Moses, and it contains a prediction of all the Jewish history down to the year B. C. 4. The end of all things is to follow close upon that date. The book is of special interest to us because it seems to have been written at some period during the lifetime of Jesus, and some of the phrases used by Jesus may have been quoted from its pages, and Stephen seems to have followed its account of the history of Moses in his speech before the Sanhedrin, and the Second Epistle of Peter makes use of it as well as the Epistle of Jude.

3. The Apocalypse of Baruch purports to be a revelation granted to Baruch, the faithful friend of the prophet Jeremiah. It is supposed to have been written shortly after the destruction of the city of Jerusalem in the year A. D. 70, and its purpose is to comfort the Jews depressed by that great disaster. According to its representation Baruch gathers the elders of the people into the valley of the Kidron, and there announces to them all the coming disasters of the city of Zion, and then predicts the Messianic reign in which it would be restored and crowned with glory forever. Swete says that this Apocalypse "approximates to the nearly contemporary Christian Apocalypse not

merely in verbal coincidences and the use of similar imagery, but in some important lines of thought."⁵⁶

4. "In some respects the closest parallel to our Apocalypse is provided by the strangely named Fourth Book of Ezra, or Esdras, a Jewish apocalypse which had a wide circulation and enjoyed great esteem in the Christian Church, and may be found to-day in the English Apocrypha. It is quoted as a genuine work of prophecy by many of the early Fathers, finds a place in several Latin manuscripts of the Bible, and appears with Third Esdras as an Appendix to the Roman Vulgate. In its original form it appears to have consisted of seven visions which purport to have been seen by Ezra in Babylon, beginning in the thirtieth year of the captivity. But the actual period of the book's composition is to be found somewhere in the first century A. D., either in the reign of Titus, as Ewald thought, or under Nerva, as Hausrath thought, or in the time of Domitian, as Schürer concluded. The limits thus suggested being practically those which are open for the Apocalypse of John, the two books may be regarded as contemporary productions, the one proceeding from a Jewish, the other from a Christian, pen."⁵⁷

Both books postpone the solution of the problem of evil to the fast-approaching end of all things. Both describe the glorious reign of the Messiah, the judgment, and something of the intermediate state. Both have angelic interpreters. Both represent the world kingdoms by living creatures—in Ezra by an eagle with three heads and twelve wings and eight secondary wings, and in John by a beast with many heads and many horns. In both books the Messiah appears in the form of a lion, and in both the lion appears for judgment. In both a woman and a city are identified, and the one fades away into the other like a dissolving view.

⁵⁶ Swete, *The Apocalypse of St. John*, p. xxii.

⁵⁷ Scott, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

5. There are other books belonging to this department of literature which may have influenced the imagery and the thought of John's Apocalypse, such as The Ascension of Isaiah, the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs, the Psalms of Solomon, and the Sibylline Oracles. We will mention only one more, The Book of the Secrets of Enoch, which was translated into English by Mr. Charles in 1896. Its editor decides that it belongs to the first half of the first Christian century, but contains fragments of still older Jewish apocalypses.

VI. THE APOCALYPSE OF JOHN AND THE JEWISH APOCALYPSSES

1. Their likeness. Our study thus far has made one thing clear—the Apocalypse of John belongs to a class of literature which had sprung up among the Jews after the prophetic inspiration had ceased in their nation. John has not originated this form of writing. He must have known some if not all of these books we have mentioned. They furnished him a pattern, which he more or less closely has followed. We must remember, as Moffatt suggests, "That some of the very features which have lost much, if not all, of their significance for later ages, ornate and cryptic expressions, allusions to coeval hopes and superstitions, grotesque fantasies and glowing creations of an Oriental imagination, the employment of current ideas about anti-christ, calculations of the immediate future, and the use of a religious or semimythical terminology which was evidently familiar to some Asiatic Christians in the first century—these more or less ephemeral elements combined to drive home the message of the book. They signify to us the toll which had to be paid to contemporary exigencies; without them the book could not have made its way at all into the conscience and the imagination of its audience."⁵⁸

⁵⁸ Expositor's Greek Testament, vol. v, p. 298.

The Pauline epistles mark the beginning of a new form of literature; and Christian letter-writing has continued through all the centuries to our own day. The Gospels and the book of Acts are the first church histories and biographies, and Christian histories and biographies will be written to the end of time. The Apocalypse of John more nearly marks the end than the beginning of a species of literature. It is "the final and brilliant flash of the red light which had gleamed from Amos down to the Maccabees."⁵⁹ There were Christian Apocalypses written later than our Apocalypse, but they were by unknown authors and never were recognized as authoritative in the general church and soon fell into disrepute and consequent neglect, and for centuries now no Christian has thought of composing an Apocalypse.

The Apocalypse of John is the only Christian Apocalypse read in the church to-day, and it stands as the last in the series of Apocalypses we have been studying. It is like these other Apocalypses (1) in the general situation and historical background to which it makes response, and (2) in the general purpose of consolation in distress which it answers, and (3) in the general doctrines, especially in the field of eschatology, which they represent, and (4) in much of the imagery and component material which they contain. For example, the Book of Enoch has a Tree of life and a Book of life, heavenly beings clothed in white, stars falling from heaven, horses wading through rivers of blood, spirits presiding over the winds and the waters, and a fiery abyss awaiting notorious sinners. All of these things reappear in the Apocalypse of John.

In the Book of the Secrets of Enoch there is a great sea above the clouds, and in the third heaven there is a paradise stocked with fruit trees bearing all manner of ripe fruits, and in the midst of it the tree of Life. "Faces

⁵⁹ Moffatt, *op. cit.*, p. 298.

are seen shining like the sun, and eyes as lamps of fire; there are angels set over seasons and years, over rivers and the sea, over all the souls of men; six-winged creatures overshadow all the throne, singing, Holy, Holy, Holy; the world week is of seven thousand years; Hades is a fortress whose keys are committed to safe keeping."⁶⁰ This is sufficient to suggest that there is much of common material in all these apocalyptic books. However, the Apocalypse of John differs most radically from all these other books in some respects, and we turn next to the enumeration of these.

2. Their Unlikeness. (1) The Apocalypse of John carries the real author's name on its forefront; and this distinguishes it from all the Jewish Apocalypses which had preceded it. They are pseudepigraphic, and it is not.

(2) They conceal not only the real author's name but his whereabouts and all facts concerning him. On the contrary, the Apocalypse of John tells us that its author was in exile on the isle of Patmos, and he writes to seven churches of Asia Minor in such a way that we know at about what time he is writing.

(3) The Apocalypse of John is a Christian book. The glorified Jesus is the Messias to whom all the Jewish writers had looked forward. He is the central and commanding figure throughout. There is a new spirit of certainty and prophetic inspiration and apostolic assurance in this Apocalypse of Jesus which the older books of necessity lacked. The Apocalypse of John is easily distinguished from all other books of the class, and vindicates its right to a place in the sacred canon from which they have been excluded. It is the consummate flower of their series, and there is a tone of divine authority about it which has spoken to the heart of the church through all time. It is the prophetic book of the New Testament. It unites the prophetic

⁶⁰ Swete, *op. cit.*, p. xxi.

element of the Old Testament with the imagery of the Jewish Apocalypses in the proclamation of the Christian faith and truth. Let us turn now to the closer study of the book itself.

VII. A MYSTERIOUS REVELATION

The Bible and the Apocalypse are alike in this respect that they are both mysterious revelations. The Bible itself is a book of revelation, and the revelation of divine truth in the Bible is so clear that even a child can understand it. He who runs may read. The essential truths of the Bible, once heard, never are forgotten. Even a wayfaring man, though he be laboring under the severest subjective disabilities, need not err therein. At one time Jesus answered and said, "I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast revealed these things unto babes. Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight."⁶¹ The Bible is a revelation unto babes, a book for the kindergarten, a religious primer in words of one syllable.

Listen to its proclamation. "God is love. . . . Ye must be born anew. . . . Come to me, . . . and I will give you rest."⁶² There is the heart of the whole thing. A revelation could not be put more simply. Anybody can understand that, and anybody who understands and appropriates these simple truths can become a Christian. Our Bible revelation of truth is in truth a revelation. Benjamin Whichcote was warranted in his profession of faith, when he said, "This for my part I do believe, that the Scripture is clear and full of light, as to all matters of conscience, as to all rules of life, as to all necessary matters of faith, so that any well-minded man that takes up the Bible and reads may come to understanding and satisfaction."

Yet while this is true that the revelation of the essentials

⁶¹ Matt. 11. 25, 26.

⁶² 1 John 4. 16; John 3. 7; Matt. 11. 28.

of salvation in the Bible is so clear and so plain that even a child can comprehend or apprehend it, it is equally true that there are other portions of this revelation which are so difficult of exegesis that they tax the utmost powers of the greatest minds to master them. There are problems in the Bible so difficult of understanding that even the wise and the prudent, after years of investigation and after a lifetime of study, declare that the Book is not a revelation but a sealed book to them. The Bible is no shallow urn whose treasures can be easily exhausted. It is like that cup given the young god Thor to drink in the city of Utgard. It could not be emptied at one draught, for all the exhaustless depths of the ocean were filling it. Great scholars have grown gray in the study of the book and still have felt, like Sir Isaac Newton, that they were but children picking up pebbles on the shore of the boundless, fathomless deep. Every book in the Bible has its problems. Every book is a book of revelation, filled with mystery.

Now, what is true of every other book in the Bible and of the Bible as a whole is still more true of the last division of the volume, as we have it to-day. We call *it*, the last book of the Bible, the book of Revelation; as though it, above all the other books, would be characterized by perspicuity, as though this crowning and closing book of the series would be easiest of exegesis and clearest and most open to every understanding. Is that true of it? The book begins, "The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show unto his servants, . . . and he sent and signified *it* by his angel unto his servant John. . . . Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep the things that are written therein: for the time is at hand."⁶³ Then we read through its twenty-two chapters, and we find ourselves overwhelmed with questionings.

What is this book anyway? Is it contemporaneous his-

⁶³ Rev. I. I, 3.

tory? Is it the history of the *end* of all things? Is it a history of the successive world kingdoms? Is it a history of the church? Is it history at all? Is it history or prophecy? Is it a prophetic drama?⁶⁴ Is it a dramatic poem? Is it pure Apocalypse? It has been called all of these things. It declares itself to be the Revelation of the Lord Jesus Christ, but it turns out to be the great enigma of the New Testament.

Dionysius of Alexandria says that there were those in the church even before his time who maintained that the title of the book was a fraudulent one, for the book was without sense or argument, and it was not a revelation, because it was covered thickly and densely by a veil of obscurity.⁶⁵ Jerome in the fourth century wrote to Paulinus that the Apocalypse of John had as many mysteries as words, *tot verba, tot mysteria*; and he added: "In saying this I have said less than the book deserves. All praise of it is inadequate; manifold meanings lie hid in its every word."⁶⁶ Many modern scholars have agreed with these conclusions. Robert South asserts that "the more the book is studied, the less it is understood," and in his usual blunt fashion he went on to say that it generally found a man cracked or it left him so.⁶⁷ Luther said that Christ could neither be learned nor recognized in the book, and he declared that no one knew what was in it, "*Niemand weiss was darinnen steht.*"

Zwingli refused to quote it for doctrinal proof of anything. De Wette declared that there were whole chapters in it which were like empty vials; empty bottles, nothing in them.

⁶⁴ So Eichhorn, Commentary, Chapter IV, Milton, Palmer, and Benson.

⁶⁵ Eusebius, Eccles. Hist., VII, 25. 1, 2; Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series, vol. i, p. 309.

⁶⁶ Letter LIII, *op. cit.*, vol. vi, p. 102.

⁶⁷ Serm. XXIII, vol. i, 377.

Possibly these scholars are right and we cannot understand or profit much by this revelation. Possibly these scholars are wrong and have been misled by the enemy of their souls whose constant endeavor it is to deceive men to their spiritual loss. Moody seemed to think so, for he said that this is the only book in the Bible which tells about the devil being chained, and the devil knows it and he goes up and down Christendom saying: "It is no use your reading the book of Revelation. You cannot understand that book. It is too hard for you," while the fact is that he does not want men to understand about his own defeat. If Moody is correct in that suggestion, it also may be true that the devil is responsible for some of the exegesis of this book.

Bengel,⁶⁸ careful critic and commentator, devout and earnest student of the Word, learned from this book that the world was to come to an end on the eighteenth of June, 1836. We who live in the twentieth century are ready to say either that that revelation was a false one or that that revelation is not to be found in the book. Hengstenberg⁶⁹ in his commentary declared that the millennial reign began in the year A. D. 800 and closed in the year A. D. 1800, and that now we live in the times of Gog, Magog, and Demagogue! That is a revelation we have failed to find in these pages. Most of us think that the millennial age is still to come.

Garratt⁷⁰ found in the book prophecies of gunpowder and cannon and steamboats and railroads; but we doubt if the book was intended to be a revelation of these. Huntingford⁷¹ made of the book a complete church history, coming down to the time of the French Revolution, and he thought that the best commentary upon John's vision is

⁶⁸ Erklärte Off. Joh., 1740.

⁶⁹ Erläuterung. 2 vols., 1849, 1850.

⁷⁰ Commentary on the Revelation, 1878.

⁷¹ The Apocalypse, with Commentary, etc., 1881.

Gibbon's Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire; but we have read Gibbon and have found in it no key to the problems which this book presents. We do not need to go through the long list of commentaries on the Apocalypse. The one thing they all very clearly prove is that the book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ is a book very difficult to understand, a book of great mystery, which does not reveal the same things to all minds and does not reveal much to some of the most profound minds among them.

Here, then, are two facts concerning the closing book of our canon. Like the Bible itself, it is, first, a book of blessed revelation and, second, a book of profound mystery. Possibly better than any other single book in the Bible collection of books, it illustrates this double characteristic of the Book as a whole, the combination of promise and puzzle which makes this volume the delight of both the child and the sage, which reveals enough to satisfy the babe in Christ while at the same time it conceals enough to make it an inexhaustible source of perplexity and subject of study to the maturest scholar and saint.

The book of Revelation is an Apocalypse, and the Apocalypse is to us a book of mystery. The Greek words for "Apocalypse" and "Mystery," *ἀποκάλυψις* and *μυστήριον*, had meanings directly opposed to each other. The New Testament usage of these words has interchanged their meanings in the most extraordinary fashion. Paul calls the gospel a mystery,⁷² but he does not mean to suggest that it is so mysterious as to be incomprehensible. He means, rather, that it was once a secret, but now it is manifested and easily understood by anyone who would hear it. It *was* unknown, but now it is a *revelation*, an open secret to all the world; that is Paul's meaning of the word "mystery" in his discussion of the Christian faith. Apocalypse meant a revelation too, an uncovering, an unveiling, a disclosing of all that

⁷² Eph. 6. 19.

was secret and making it public property. However, the Apocalypse in the New Testament is such a mysterious book that that fact almost has made us lose sight of the first meaning of the word. The New Testament "mystery" is a revelation, an Apocalypse. The New Testament Apocalypse has come to stand in our minds for a mystery, a secret undisclosed. It is a mysterious revelation whose meaning eludes us at many points and whose interpretation baffles us again and again. This is a surprise and a disappointment because no book in the Bible raises our hopes so high and gives us reason for so great expectation in the beginning.

VIII. THE FOURFOLD ASSURANCE OF THE BEGINNING AND THE FEARFUL THREAT AT THE END

We note, first, the Personal Presence of the Revealer in the first chapter. No other book in the New Testament has such a solemn beginning. Some of the books of the New Testament almost seem to have been written by accident. At least they were called forth by certain things which had happened. They were written to meet certain occasions; and there is no slightest indication in the books themselves that the authors of them ever expected them to serve any other than temporary need or to be read by any more than a single individual or a single church. This might be true of the Second and the Third Epistle of John; but it is not so with the Apocalypse. The Christophany of the beginning is like the Theophanies given to Isaiah and Jeremiah and Ezekiel. Solemn, majestic, awe-inspiring, the Revealer is seen first in his divine glory; and then comes the Revelation.

We note, second, the Pleading of the book itself. In the second and third chapters of the book we have seven epistles addressed to seven churches of Asia Minor. It has been suggested that in these seven epistles we have an

epitome of the contents of the entire book. At the close of each of these epistles we come upon that exhortation, "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches."⁷³ In this seven-times repeated cry we are told that the Spirit is speaking to the churches in this book, and we are exhorted to hear what the Spirit has to say. We note this seven-times repeated Pleading found in the beginning summary of the book; and we are impressed with the unusual importance of the message we are about to receive.

We notice, in the third place, the Purpose for which the book was written, as announced by the author himself. He tells us that he was a brother and partaker with those whom he addressed in the tribulation and kingdom and patience which are in Jesus,⁷⁴ and he declares that he purposes to show unto these the things which must shortly come to pass.⁷⁵ Bearing in mind this Purpose of spiritual and valuable revelation and the sevenfold Pleading that we may hear what the Spirit has to say to the churches, and the guarantee of authority in the Personal Presence of the Revealer in the opening vision of the book, we note, in the fourth place, the Promise prefixed to this volume. There we read, "Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of the prophecy, and keep the things which are written therein: for the time is at hand."⁷⁶ This is the only book in the Bible which has any explicit promise of that sort attached to it. It may be that we will be blessed in reading some or all of these other books in the Bible. We take it for granted that we will be; but here assurance is rendered doubly sure by this explicit promise put into our hands as we open the book.

⁷³ Rev. 2. 7, 11, 17, 29; 3. 6, 13, 22.

⁷⁴ Rev. 1. 9.

⁷⁵ Rev. 1. 1.

⁷⁶ Rev. 1. 3.

Corresponding to this promise in the preface, there is a solemn Threat at the close. "I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto them, God shall add unto him the plagues which are written in this book: and if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the tree of life, and out of the holy city, which are written in this book."⁷⁷ Both at the beginning and at the end of his book John seems to be conscious of the supreme importance of what he is writing and to expect it to be read in wide circles and to be heard by multitudes and to be a blessing to all to whom it may come. He seems anxious to preserve the text intact, so that even if it is copied again and again, the last to receive it in the farthest remove of territory or among the latest generations of men may be sure of having the original truth. The language he uses is taken from two passages in Deuteronomy, and in the adoption of these words John seems to put his writing upon a par with that of Moses and to claim for it a place in sacred Scripture for all time.

The Personal Presence there at the beginning of the book, the Purpose of the book, the Pleading of the book, the Promise of the book, and the Threat at the end lead us to think that this will be a book of clearest and invaluable revelation, and having finished the first three chapters, we are ready to read on with four times the confidence with which we would approach any other pages of the Bible. Then as we plunge on from chapter to chapter we find ourselves getting farther and farther out of our depth, the puzzles and problems multiply on every hand, and while there are passages here and there which are beautifully simple and blessedly clear, we soon see that the book as a whole is the most difficult to comprehend in the whole Bible.

⁷⁷ Rev. 22. 18, 19.

IX. TWO REASONS WHY THE INSPIRATION OF THE BOOK HAS BEEN DOUBTED

1. One critic has said, "Here all is dark and perplexing—an extravagance of figure such as was never before witnessed, and an irregularity of language such as has no parallel in any ancient writing, either sacred or profane." Augustine was of the same opinion: "Though this book is called the Apocalypse, there are in it many obscure passages to exercise the mind of the reader, and there are few passages so plain as to assist us in the interpretation of the others, even though we take pains; and this difficulty is increased by the repetition of the same things, in forms so different that the things referred to seem to be different, although, in fact, they are only differently stated."⁷⁸

A modern scholar refuses to accept various theories of interpretation of the Apocalypse and then confesses: "I am unable to give any better solution of my own, feeling like one of Cicero's disputants, '*facilius me, talibus de rebus, quid non sentirem, quam quid sentirem, posse dicere.*'"⁷⁹ It is small wonder then that there always have been those who have doubted whether this book was inspired and who have been ready to ask, "If the other books of the Bible are inspired books, how can this book be inspired? If they are adapted to the revelation of the new dispensation, how can it be adapted to the same end? Is it possible that this book can be from Him who leads in a plain path and has promised his clear teaching and the sure knowledge of his truth?"

2. Many of the interpreters of this book have helped to bring it into disrepute. They are so sure, each of them, that they are right. They are equally sure that all others are radically wrong. They differ with each other as widely

⁷⁸ De Civit. Dei, XX, 17; Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, vol. ii, p. 436.

⁷⁹ Salmon, Introduction to the New Testament, p. 224.

as possible both in their systems of interpretation and in the results of their research. The same figures represent to different exegetes characters as different as could be imagined and the same forms of expression furnish them with dates which differ from each other by centuries. We are apt to conclude that every man makes the book mean just what he desires it to mean, and we *can* make it mean whatever we choose.

The book has been grossly misused by those who have endeavored to discover in it a chronology either of world history or of the end of all things. Jülicher is surely right when he says, "It is unreasonable to treat the detail of its imageries as an authentic source for a history of the past or the future."⁸⁰ This is especially true of the attempts to figure out from its data the exact time for the end of the world. Those who waste their time in this effort seem to have forgotten what the Lord said, "Of that day or that hour knoweth no one, not even the angels in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father."⁸¹

John had no thought of prying into the secrets of the Most High. He believed, like all the other writers of the New Testament, that the end of the world would come unexpectedly, like a thief in the night. In view of that fact he has scattered exhortations to watchfulness through all his book. At the Lord's command he wrote to the angel of the church in Sardis, "If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee."⁸² In one of the later visions of the great day of God, the Almighty, he interrupts the narrative to insert the statement, "Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth."⁸³ Watchfulness was necessary because neither John nor any man knew the hour of the Lord's approach.

⁸⁰ Jülicher, Introduction, p. 168.

⁸¹ Mark 13. 32.

⁸² Rev. 3. 3.

⁸³ Rev. 16. 15.

Philip Schaff has well said: "All mathematical calculations about the second advent are doomed to disappointment, and those who want to know more than our blessed Lord knew in the days of his flesh deserve to be disappointed. 'It is not for you to know times or seasons, which the Father hath set within his own authority,' Acts 1. 7. This settles the question."⁸⁴ However, many of the commentators do not have his common sense, and when we turn to them we find many of their books filled with the most absurd conclusions, based upon the most extravagant exegesis. They are impositions, rather than expositions.

X. SOME CURIOSITIES OF EXEGESIS

1. Take that problem of the antichrist as one example. Bishop Rainieri of Florence figured it out on the basis of the data furnished him in this book that the antichrist was to be born in the year A. D. 1080. Fifty years after that date we find Saint Norbert, in 1130, telling Saint Bernard the same thing. A century after this, in 1227, Peter the Minorite was preaching that the antichrist was then ten years old. Two hundred years later, in 1412, Vincent of Ferrara told Pope Benedict VIII that the antichrist was nine years old at that date. Bengel declared that the beginning of the conflict with the antichrist would come in the year 1790. Hengstenberg decided that Satan was set loose in the year 1848. You can take your choice. If one of these men is right, the others are wrong. Who can tell which one of them is right? Who knows but that all of them are wrong? We think that the latter supposition represents the largest probability and, indeed, the certainty in the case. These conclusions evidently are not based upon general principles, but upon the individual environment. They are the results of personal prejudice rather than of preeminent spiritual insight.

2. Notice the different conclusions as to the human in-

⁸⁴ Schaff, *op. cit.*, p. 850.

carnations of the antichrist. Amalrich of Bena said in his day that the power and the spirit of the antichrist was represented by John Wiclif and the heterodox Mystics. Later, the Roman Catholic theologians were sure that the personality of the antichrist was incarnate in Martin Luther and the other Reformers. On the other hand, the leaders of the Protestant Reformation were sure that the papacy was the great whore and the pope was the antichrist.

3. Bellarmin, the Jesuit, said the hellish grasshoppers of the ninth chapter were the Reformers. Nicolas Vignier said the hellish grasshoppers were the monks.

4. Bugenhagen, in 1546, said that the angel with the eternal gospel, in 14. 6, was Martin Luther, Calovius went a step farther and said that the three angels mentioned in this chapter were Luther, Chemnitz, and himself. Such a conclusion is liable to the suspicion that it is the result of personal bias and that it has been based upon personal prepossessions.

5. As a sample of one of the apocalyptic problems and a good example of radically differing and mutually exclusive interpretations, look at the number of the beast. We read, "He that hath understanding, let him count the number of the beast; for it is the number of a man: and his number is Six hundred and sixty and six"; and in the margin we find, "Some ancient authorities read, *Six hundred and sixteen.*"⁸⁵ Then we turn to the commentators and the exegetes to see who among them has understanding and can interpret the number of the beast and give us the name of the man. We find a host of them with rival explanations, and each of them is sure he is right. They prove to us, each in turn, that the beast is Caligula, Nero, Titus, Trajan, Julian the Apostate, Genseric the Vandal, Pope Benedict IX, Pope Paul V, Louis XV, Mohammed, Martin Luther, John Calvin, Beza, Archbishop Laud, the Duke of Reichstadt, and Napoleon Bonaparte.⁸⁶

⁸⁵ Rev. 13. 18.

⁸⁶ Salmon, Introduction to New Testament, p. 230.

It was in the nineteenth century that the famous discovery of the long-sought-for true and indisputable explanation of that mysterious number six hundred and sixty-six took place. It seems to have been made simultaneously and independently by Fritzche in Rostock, Benary in Berlin, Reuss in Strassburg, and Hitzig in Zurich. Each of these claims to have hit upon it first; just as there are many rival claimants for the first invention of the telephone. Each of these men tells us that the name is Nero Cæsar, written in Hebrew letters. The Hebrews and Greeks had no figures like ours. They gave a numerical value to the letters of their alphabet, and thus made them do double service in mathematics and in literature. *Every* man's name, therefore, represented a certain number, found by adding together the numerical equivalents of the various letters by which it was spelled.

In the Epistle of Barnabas we are told that the name "Jesus," Ἰησοῦς, is expressed by the number eight hundred and eighty-eight, and we obtain that number by adding together the numerical equivalents of the Greek letters.⁸⁷ In the Pseudo-Sibylline verses, written by Christians, probably toward the end of the second century, there are enigmas giving a number and requiring a name. One on the name "Jesus," Ἰησοῦς, reads as follows: "He will come on earth clothed with flesh like mortal men. His name contains four vowels and two consonants; two of the former being sounded together. And I will declare the entire number. For the name will exhibit to incredulous men eight units, eight tens, and eight hundreds." Now as the number of Jesus is eight hundred and eighty-eight, John tells us that the number of the beast is six hundred and sixty-six, and this is also the name of a man. This name, the scholars tell us, is Nero Cæsar.

When we add together the numerals represented by the

⁸⁷ Ι = 10; η = 8; σ = 200; ο = 70; υ = 400; ρ = 200.

Hebrew letters spelling the name and title, Nero Cæsar, we have a total of six hundred and sixty-six.⁸⁸ In this explanation that alternate number, six hundred and sixteen, found in the margin, is accounted for. If we spell Nero without a final Nun that drops fifty out of the sum total and leaves us, instead of six hundred and sixty-six, only six hundred and sixteen. This solution of the mystery has been adopted by Baur, Zeller, Hilgenfeld, Volkmar, Hausrath, Krenkel, Renan, Sabatier, Davidson, Farrar, Stuart, Cowles, and many others. The great objection to it is that it seems so easy and self-evident and yet nobody seems to have suspected it in the early church or for the first eighteen centuries of church history. It would be marvelous indeed if, having remained hidden from all the scholars and saints of the church through so many centuries, the correct interpretation should suddenly and simultaneously become manifest to four German professors. Caligula in Hebrew and in Greek, either as קָלִיגָּוּלָם סָפָר or ΤΑΙΟΣ KAICAP, by gematria is equivalent to 616, and so is KAICAP ΘΕΟC, the Emperor (is) God!

Salmon in his Introduction says: "A man must know very little of the history of the interpretations of this number if he can flatter himself that because he has found a word the numerical value of whose letters makes the required sum he is sure of having the true solution. . . . There are three rules by the help of which I believe an ingenious man could find the required sum in any given name. First, if the proper name by itself will not yield it, add a title; secondly, if the sum cannot be found in Greek, try Hebrew, or even Latin; thirdly, do not be too particular about the spelling. The use of a language different from that to which the name properly belongs allows a good deal of latitude in the transliteration. For example, if Nero will not do, try Cæsar Nero. If this will not succeed in Greek,

⁸⁸ קָרְנוֹן סָפָר. נ = 50; ר = 200; ו = 6; נ = 50; פ = 100; ס = 60; ר = 200.

try Hebrew; and in writing Kaisar in Hebrew be sure to leave out the Jod, which would make the sum too much by ten." And then Salmon concludes, "We cannot infer much from the fact that a key fits the lock if it is a lock in which almost any key will turn."⁸⁹

Then he quotes with approval the way in which Irenæus sums up the whole situation. Irenæus had made at least three guesses himself at this number. He had suggested, *εὐάνθας*, "the Golden-haired," *λατεῖνος*, "the Latin," and *τεῖταν*, "the Titan." All of these words will count up that number, six hundred and sixty-six; but there were so many words which would do that that Irenæus said, "It is safer, therefore, and less hazardous to await the event of the prophecy than to try to guess or divine the name, since haply the same number may be found to suit many names. For if the names which are found to contain the same number prove to be many, which of them will be borne by the coming one will remain a matter of inquiry."⁹⁰

It may be interesting to notice in this connection that Heumann, Herder, Volkmar, and Godet suggest that the number six hundred and sixty-six, which in Greek letters is *χξς*, consists of the usual abbreviation of the name of Christ, *χς*, and then between these two letters, thrusting them asunder, that other letter is inserted, which is a fit symbol of the serpent in form and in sound, to represent the power of the antichrist in its endeavor to break asunder and scatter abroad the representatives of the Holy Name. Godet puts it thus: "Observe, first, that in the Greek it is written, not with the same figure three times repeated, but with three letters of different shapes, the mutual relation of whose values (six hundreds, six tens, six units) is not at first sight clear. . . . Next, observe that these three Greek letters have a peculiarity which is not reproduced in our numerical writing." He then gives the explanation of

⁸⁹ Salmon, Introduction, pp. 230, 231.

⁹⁰ Against Heresies, V, 30; Ante-Nicene Fathers, vol. i, p. 559.

the letters just mentioned, and adds, "Now, as the name which John commonly gives to Satan in the Apocalypse is the *old serpent*, in allusion to the story of the temptation in Gen. 3, one is naturally disposed to see in these three letters, so arranged, a figurative sign of the *Satanic Messianism*, substituted for that of the *Divine Messianism*, or Christianity."⁹¹

All of which is very ingenious; but we are still of the opinion of Irenæus that it will be best to await the solution of the mystery in the light of better data than we now have. Swete, one of the latest commentators on the Apocalypse, says, "It is possible that the Number of the Beast holds its secret still. Although the challenge δ ἔχων νοῦν ψηφισάτω τὸν ἀριθμόν has been accepted by the scholars of many generations, no solution hitherto offered commands general assent."⁹²

Many incline to think that the number six hundred and sixty-six was purely symbolical in the mind of John, to represent the one who continuously fell short of perfection, 6—6—6 never becoming seven. Or, the three sixes represent worldly glory, worldly wisdom, worldly civilization which when joined together still fall short of divine perfection. Such or similar views were held by Herder, Auberlen, Hengstenberg, Maurice, Wordsworth, Vaughan, Carpenter, and others. A symbolical interpretation would either preclude an individual appropriation of this number or it would allow many such individual appropriations and thus could be made the peculiar property of none. We have cited these as curiosities of exegesis, nothing more. They are samples of interpretations which might be paralleled and multiplied on almost every page of the book. The only safe way in studying the book of Revelation is to get one commentator and read him and believe everything he says.

⁹¹ Biblical Studies, New Testament, pp. 388, 389.

⁹² Swete, *op. cit.*, p. cxxxiii.

If we read another commentator, we will find him contradicting the conclusions of the former, and we will be more or less thrown into confusion; and if we read twenty commentators, we are likely to end by being in a state of absolute uncertainty about everything.

XI. BEST GENERAL ATTITUDE TOWARD THE BOOK

The man who knows what everything in this book means is the man of narrow outlook and meager information. Adam Clarke said he could not pretend to explain this book, for he did not understand it. John Wesley said: "How little do we know of this deep book! At least how little do I know. I can barely conjecture, not affirm, any one point concerning that part of it which is yet unfilled."⁹³ Men of the mental caliber of these giants of the faith will, as a general rule, come to the same conclusion. *Est etiam nesciendi quædam ars.*

There are some people who do not like to come to that conclusion. They never get over the feeling that they ought to know all of everything. They rather resent the fact that God does not choose to make them equi-omniscient with himself. They complain of Bible obscurities as though in some fashion they constituted a personal affront. They chafe under the limitations of their finite, if not infinite, ignorance; and are ready to lose their temper if you suggest that their proposed solution of any problem is not assuredly and infallibly correct. Anyway, they prefer to worry about dark passages rather than to walk in the light of the clear ones. There are difficulties in the Bible which probably will be to us forever insurmountable, problems which will be to us insoluble, many things which we would like to know but possibly never will be able to know with all our study and endeavor.

When Talmage was a student he persisted in posing his

⁹³ Journal, December 6, 1762.

professor with questions about the great Bible mysteries; asking things which no man could answer. One day the professor turned upon him with this retort, "Mr. Talmage, you will have to let God know some things you don't." Those were wise words written in the Preface to the Authorized Version in the Address of the Translators to the Reader: "It hath pleased God in his divine providence here and there to scatter words and sentences of that difficulty and doubtfulness, not in doctrinal points that concern salvation (for in such it hath been vouched that the Scriptures are plain), but in matters of less moment, that fearfulness would better beseem us than confidence." We might as well recognize that fact first as last.

There are some things in the Bible we cannot know. Possibly there never was a more vigorous intellect wrestling with the great problems of the Christian faith than that of Martin Luther, the great Reformer. What does Luther say? "If a difficulty meets thee which thou canst not solve, so let it go." We do not like to do that. We feel like saying to ourselves, "Here is a difficulty, a stone wall we cannot see through or climb over. What shall we do about it? Forsooth against it we will proceed instanter to beat out our brains!" Luther knew better. He was great enough to know that he could not know all things. He was humble enough to believe that there were some mysteries he must be content to leave unsolved. He was great enough and wise enough to say, "So let it go." Now, if there is any book in the Bible in the study of which it would be wise for us to follow Luther's advice, it is this book of the Revelation of John.

XII. DIFFERENT SCHOOLS OF INTERPRETATION

Having said so much by way of preface to this subject, let us glance at some of the different systems or schools of interpretation.

1. There is the Preterist School, represented more or less faithfully by Grotius, Hammond, Bousset, Clericus, Wetstein, Herder, Hug, Eichhorn, Ewald, De Wette, Lücke, Baur, Bleek, Volkmar, Düsterdieck, Reuss, Renan, Cowles, Krenkel, Weizsäcker, Weiss, Moses Stuart, Maurice, Davidson, Farrar, and others. This school holds that all these prophecies refer to events which are now past, and have been long fulfilled.

2. Then there is the Futurist School, represented by Ribera, De Burgh, Maitland, Benj. Newton, Todd, Isaac Williams, W. Kelly, Hofmann, Füller, Kliefoth, Zahn, and others. These believe that the prophecies relate to events which lie in the future, probably in the far future, and which will be fulfilled only at the coming of the Lord, usually conceived as a catastrophic parousia.

3. Then there is the Historical School, which partly agrees with each of the schools preceding. The representatives of this school think that some of the prophecies have been fulfilled, and some are to be fulfilled, and some are being fulfilled. In the Apocalypse, that is to say, they find a history of events extending from the beginning of the Christian era to the end of the age. Luther, Bullinger and many of the Reformers belonged to this school, as do also Mede, Vitringa, Sir Isaac Newton, Whiston, Bengel, Bishop Newton, Hengstenberg, Ebrard, Auberlen, Elliott, Faber, Bishop Wordsworth, Dean Alford, Barnes, Bickersteth, Birks, Gaussen, Godet, Lee, Vaughan, Benson, Boyd-Carpenter, Milligan, Scott, Swete, and others. Among these Weiss and Holtzmann and others have suggested subdivisions. There is the Church-historical School, which thinks that all these visions and apocalyptic pictures are to be interpreted of the events of church history alone. There is the Imperial-historical School which makes them refer to the rise and fall of world-kingdoms, the development and the decline of great world-powers as they successively influence the life and growth of the church.

XIII. BEST SYSTEM OF INTERPRETATION

In which of these shall we enroll ourselves? We are tempted to say, As far as possible, in all. They each have some good in them, and we are inclined to think that in some things each of them may be right. However, we think that all are wrong who limit the application of these prophecies and the fulfillment of these apocalyptic visions to any particular time in the past, the present, or the future, or to any particular event or series of events in church or world history, either in time or at the end of time.

We believe that the apostle John was more nearly a poet and a philosopher than any other of the twelve. "Our author is a poet," says Porter, "whether consciously or not, since, whether taken as word-pictures or as actualities his visions were to him, as they are to us, symbols of spiritual realities, of Christian faith and hopes." And again: "There was something of a poet in the apocalyptic seer. He was seldom simply a scribe and a literalist."⁹⁴ We believe that John saw into the heart of things. He had a most extraordinary gift of loving intuition. He always was more interested in the underlying principles of things than he was in any surface facts. In the fourth Gospel we saw how John went deeper than the synoptics into the heart of the beginnings of Christian history and how he gave us a spiritual interpretation of the mysteries of the Messianic career. In the First Epistle we found him interested in the broad and general principles of Christian conduct and their application to specific cases was left to the individuals concerned. So now in the Apocalypse, upon the basis of visions divinely granted him, he has wrought out in epic grandeur a panorama of the great principles which have controlled, and do control, and forever will control all history. These principles have displayed themselves, and do display themselves, and will display themselves in various

⁹⁴ Hastings's Bible Dictionary, vol. iv, pp. 248, 265.

forms. The Preterist is right in thinking that some of these principles have been seen in events which are past. Some of these apocalyptic figures, great panoramic pictures of the principles which are in continuous conflict through all time, great dramas of spiritual victories and fiendish defeat, have had their partial if not final fulfillment again and again in Christian history; and what has been true of them in the past is true of them now and will be true of them again and again in the future days.

Dr. Vaughan, in his Lectures on the Revelation, in discussing the apocalyptic language of Jesus and John, says: "These words are wonderful in all senses, not least in this sense that they are manifold in their accomplishment. Wherever there is a little flock in a waste wilderness; wherever there is a church in a world; wherever there is a power of unbelief, ungodliness, and violence, throwing itself upon Christ's faith and Christ's people, and seeking to overbear, and to demolish, and to destroy: whether that power be the power of Jewish bigotry and fanaticism, as in the days of the first disciples; or of pagan Rome, with its idolatries and its cruelties, as in the days of John and of the Revelation; or of papal Rome, with its lying wonders and its anti-Christian assumptions, in ages later still; or of open and rampant atheism, as in the days of the first French Revolution; or of a subtler and more insidious infidelity, like that which is threatening now to deceive, if it were possible, the very elect; wherever and whatever this power may be—and it has had a thousand forms, and may be destined yet to assume a thousand more—then, in each successive century, the words of Christ to his first disciples adapt themselves afresh to the circumstances of his struggling servants; warn them of danger, exhort them to patience, arouse them to hope, assure them of victory; tell of a near end for the individual and for the generation; tell also of a far end, not forever to be postponed, for time itself and for the world; predict a destruction which

shall befall each enemy of the truth, and predict a destruction which shall befall the enemy himself whom each in turn has represented and served; explain the meaning of tribulation, show whence it comes, and point to its swallowing up in glory; reveal the moving hand above, and disclose, from behind the cloud which conceals it, the clear definite purpose and the unchanging loving will. Thus understood, each separate downfall of evil becomes a prophecy of the next and of the last; and the partial fulfillment of our Lord's words in the destruction of Jerusalem, or of John's words in the downfall of idolatry and the dismemberment of Rome, becomes itself in turn a new warrant for the church's expectation of the Second Advent and of the day of judgment."⁹⁵

John primarily had in mind the conditions of his own day, the conflict then waging, and the judgment then sure. His symbols refer in the first instance to these: but they are not exhausted in their first application. History has fulfilled them again and again. History repeats itself in many ways. There was a close parallel between the heathen arrogance and antagonism of the Cæsar-worship in Asia Minor in John's day and the tyrannies and impostures and persecutions of papal Rome in later days. The Protestants could show good reason for their application of the Apocalyptic symbols to the exactions and the anti-Christian practices of the priesthood and the pope.

There was a judgment day upon pagan Rome: and the ancient world with its idolatries came to an end and a new world freed from heathen superstitions took its place. There was a judgment day upon papal Rome; and it was deposed from its high seat of power and the day of its exclusive sovereignty came to an end; and a new era of intellectual liberty and of religious freedom dawned on the race. There was a judgment day in France, and the

⁹⁵ P. 170.

heartless extravagance of the aristocratic classes at last was called to account, and in the French Revolution that condition of affairs in which their iniquity had flourished came to an end and modern Democracy was born in its funeral flames. Another judgment day is set in all Europe now and militarism is doomed and a new social revolution is well on its way. After the great war, in Europe and America and in all the world the predatory rich must give an account of their methods and the downtrodden poor must be granted their rights: and there will be an end of the old order of things and there will be a new earth in which righteousness reigns.

In all these succeeding cycles of church and world history the symbols of John's Apocalypse find new realization. Their first application broadens out into greater significance and finds completer fulfillment, and their eternal verity becomes increasingly apparent as the centuries roll by. John must have had some sense of this fact when he opened his book with such a sweeping promise to those who read it and heard it, and closed it with such a sweeping curse upon those who added to it or took from it anything at all.

Irenæus suggested that the name of the beast might be Λατεῖνος⁹⁶ representing the Latin or Roman empire. This solution of the puzzle has been adopted by Hippolytus, Bellarmin, Eichhorn, Bleek, De Wette, Ebrard, Düsterdieck, Alford, Wordsworth, Lee, and others. Then the Protestants went a step farther and declared that this name of the beast might stand for the papal power or the Holy Roman Empire as well. Luther, Vitrunga, Bengel, Auberlen, Hengstenberg, Ebrard, and others held this view.

Dean Alford agrees in giving it the double signification. He says, "This name describes the common character of the rulers of the former Pagan Roman Empire; and, what

⁹⁶ λ = 30 + α = 1 + τ = 300 + ε = 5 + i = 10 + ν = 50 + o = 70 + σ = 200 = total 666.

Irenæus could not foresee, unites under itself the character of the later Papal Roman Empire also, as revived and kept up by the agency of its false prophet, the priesthood. The Latin Empire, the Latin Church, Latin Christianity, have ever been its commonly current appellations: its language, civil and ecclesiastical, has ever been Latin: its public services, in defiance of the most obvious requisite for public worship, have ever been throughout the world conducted in Latin; there is no one word which could so completely describe its character, and at the same time unite the ancient and the modern attributes of the two beasts, as this. Short of saying absolutely that this *was* the word in John's mind, I have the strongest persuasion that no other can be found approaching so near to a complete solution."⁹⁷ It is the double solution, the proof of manifold fulfillment in history, which leads him to this certainty of conclusion.

John's inspiration is as apparent in this as in anything else. He was little concerned about any temporal phenomena. He was interested in eternal principles. He was the great prophet of the New Testament times; but at the same time he was the great poet and philosopher of the early church. His deep insight gave him great foresight; but the foresight of the Apocalypse is not so much that of particular events or actual things as it is an ideal unfolding of the general principles which would be active in all future time. This book is a book of visions; it "requires for its interpretation some measure of idealistic power." These men who have turned the book into a time-table and have figured out prophetic forecasts of church and world-history which they insist we shall accept without question as a divine revelation, given of God through the apostle John as interpreted by them, these are the men who have brought this book into a disrepute it does not deserve.

⁹⁷ Compare Schaff, *op. cit.*, pp. 844, 845.

The Apocalypse is no almanac of dates. It is no chart of consecutive events. It is a book of poetic-prophetic revelation, of beautiful symbolism, of magnificent imagery, of eternal principles, of divine truth. Says Weiss, "From the religious point of view it is a kind of philosophy of history to which Apocalyptic prophecy gives birth, though not in the form of calm reflection, but in imaginative intuition."⁹⁸ We believe, therefore, that the ideal commentator upon the Apocalypse will be a deeply emotional and religious philosopher, a philosopher not so shallow as to be prosy in his style and his outlook, but profound enough to be poetic in his insight and prophetic in his intuition. We need a John to interpret John. From the devotional standpoint Christina Rossetti comes nearest the apostle in her religious fervor and her poetic power.⁹⁹ Robert Browning would have made a magnificent commentator upon the Apocalypse.

For the correct interpretation of this book we would prescribe the following general principles: 1. The scope of the book in its primary and secondary fulfillments covers the whole of the Christian era, from the first coming to the last coming and the final triumph of the Lord. Its historical horizon, very definite and limited in John's own day, may be an ever shifting and an ever advancing one as the successive ages roll by; but these two great events, the first and second coming of the Lord, are the two limits within which the whole action lies. 2. The book is chiefly concerned with the setting forth of the great principles, in view of which the church is to preserve its patience and make persistent preparation for the ultimate triumph of its faith. It ought to be studied as apocalypse rather than prophecy, not for the discovery of successive future events but for the unfolding of the principles and powers underlying and overshadowing all events from the beginning to

⁹⁸ Introduction to the New Testament, vol. ii, p. 62.

⁹⁹ See her devotional commentary, *The Face of the Deep*.

the end. 3. The visions of this book are symbolical; their interpretation ought to be spiritual; the best interpreter will combine within himself the powers of the prophet, poet, and philosopher, the powers of abstraction, intuition, and imagination. 4. The symbols of the book are capable of manifold fulfillment. No single series of events will exhaust their meaning. Having decided their primary application, the way is open to a study of their significance in the light of all history.

XIV. GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS

The reasons for these principles of interpretation will be more apparent, if we glance at the general characteristics of the book.

1. First among these we notice its dependence upon the visions and the prophecies and the phraseology of the Old Testament for both the subject matter and the formal setting of its thought. We are reminded of the parallel visions in Ezekiel when we read in the fourth chapter of the four living creatures and the sealed book; in the tenth chapter, of the little book to be eaten; in 7. 3 and 9. 4, of the sealing on the forehead of the servants of God; in 20. 8, of Gog and Magog and the armies they gather together; in 11. 1 and 21. 15, of the measuring of the temple of God and the city of gold; and in 22. 1, the river of life with its unfailing fullness and its banks with trees filled with foliage and fruit. The weird and wonderful visions of Ezekiel, unique in the Old Testament, reappear here in the Apocalypse. They belong now to the church of the new covenant as well as to the church of the old dispensation.

There are fully as many parallels with the book of Daniel. Notice among others, in 1. 1, the sending of the angel; in 10. 6, the swearing of the angel; in 12. 7, Michael the archangel; in 1. 13, the name and the description of the

Son of man; in 13. 1, the beast with his many heads and horns; in 19. 20, the lake of fire. There are forty-five references to the book of Daniel in the Apocalypse. Stalker thinks that the apostle John must have had the book of Daniel with him on the island of Patmos, and that he must have been reading and studying it on that Lord's Day when the Spirit came upon him and these visions were given him. We think it is just as likely that he had the entire Old Testament: and if he did not happen to have it in his hand that day, we know that he had it in his heart always.

There is no direct quotation of the Old Testament anywhere in this book; not one! Yet the mental equipment and the literary furnishing of the writer of the Apocalypse evidently is based wholly upon the Old Testament. There are reminiscences of its sayings everywhere. Dr. Terry said, "There is scarcely a vision or symbol in the whole book which is not to some extent modeled after something similar in the Old Testament." Milligan, in his Lectures on the Revelation of John, goes even farther than this, and asserts, "It may be doubted whether it contains a single figure not drawn from the Old Testament, or a single complete sentence not more or less built up of materials brought from the same source." See, for instance, Balaam, Jezebel, Michael, Abaddon, Jerusalem, Mount Zion, Babylon, the Euphrates, Sodom, Egypt, Gog, and Magog. Similarly, the tree of life, the scepter of iron, the potter's vessels, the morning star. Heaven is described under the figure of a tabernacle in the wilderness. The song of the redeemed is the song of Moses. The plagues of Egypt appear in the blood, fire, thunder, darkness, and locusts.

"The great earthquake of chapter six is taken from Haggai; the sun becoming black as sackcloth of hair and the moon becoming blood, from Joel; the stars of heaven falling as a scroll, from Isaiah; the scorpions of chapter nine, from Ezekiel; the gathering of the vine of the earth,

from Joel; and the treading of the wine-press in the same chapter, from Isaiah." So too the details of a single vision are gathered out of different prophets or different parts of the same prophet. For instance, the vision of the glorified Redeemer, i. 12-20. The golden candlesticks are from Exodus and Zechariah; the garment down to the foot, from Exodus and Daniel; the golden girdle and the hairs like wool, from Isaiah and Daniel; the feet like burnished brass and the voice like the sound of many waters, from Ezekiel; the two-edged sword, from Isaiah and Psalms; the countenance like the sun, from Exodus; the falling of the seer as dead, from Exodus, Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel; the laying of Jesus' right hand on the seer, from Daniel.

"Not, indeed, that the writer binds himself to the Old Testament in a slavish spirit. He rather uses it with great freedom and independence, extending, intensifying, or transfiguring its descriptions at his pleasure. Yet the main source of his emblems cannot be mistaken. The sacred books of his people had been more than familiar to him. They had penetrated his whole being. They had lived with him as a germinating seed, capable of shooting up not only in the old forms, but in new forms of life and beauty. In the whole extent of sacred and religious literature there is to be found nowhere else such a perfect fusion of the revelation given to Israel with the mind of one who would either express Israel's ideas, or give utterance, by means of the symbols supplied by Israel's history, to the present and most elevated thoughts of the Christian faith."¹⁰⁰

John's spirit and style are saturated with the influence of the Old Testament images and allusions, language and thought. Düsterdieck declares that there is no other New Testament book which is so Old Testamental in tone.¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ The above quotations and condensations from Milligan found in Vincent's Word Studies, vol. ii, pp. 450, 451.

¹⁰¹ Meyer's Commentary, p. 64.

In Westcott and Hort's Appendix to the Greek New Testament a table is given,¹⁰² which shows that in the four hundred and four verses of the Apocalypse there are about two hundred and sixty-five which contain Old Testament language and about five hundred and fifty references are made in them to Old Testament passages.¹⁰³

An examination of these references shows that in proportion to its length John has made more use of the book of Daniel than of any other of the Old Testament books. More than half of his Old Testament references are to the Psalms, Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel. Next in frequency of use come Genesis, Exodus, Deuteronomy, Jeremiah, Joel, and Zechariah. He uses every book of the Law, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, Proverbs, the Song of Songs, Job, all of the major prophets and seven of the minor prophets. He evidently knew his Bible from cover to cover. The names of God in the Apocalypse are all Old Testament names. There is no "Abba, Father" in this book: but "the Lord God Almighty" and "the Lord God of the holy prophets." There is a sense in which the Apocalypse is not an original production. It is made up of visions and teachings of an earlier date.

2. We notice as a second characteristic of the Apocalypse, the unity and symmetry, the beauty and power of its composition. Weiss speaks of "its fullness of dramatic life" and "wealth of poetic imagery."¹⁰⁴ Jülicher mentions the "*erhabenen Ausdruck*," the elevated expression, and "*das Grossartige*," the great and grand in this half prophetic and half poetic literature.¹⁰⁵ Donald Fraser says: "The book is most carefully constructed, curiously wrought, nicely arranged, and skillfully balanced. . . . It has a per-

¹⁰² Pp. 184-188.

¹⁰³ Hastings's Bible Dictionary, vol. iv, p. 254. Compare Swete, p. cxxxv.

¹⁰⁴ Introduction to the New Testament, p. 64.

¹⁰⁵ Einleitung, p. 162.

fect internal order and, if one may use such an expression, artistic symmetry. . . . Only the most careless reader can suppose the book to be tangled or confused. It is a masterpiece of construction, fitted and bound together by wisdom from above.”¹⁰⁶ Milligan declares, “No book probably ever proceeded from the pen of man all the parts of which were so closely interlaced with one another.” Holtzmann affirms, “Its inner unity is the foundation of all more recent work on the Apocalypse.”

However, many attempts have been made in the last half-century to prove that this book is a compilation from different written sources or a revision by a Christian hand of a Jewish Apocalypse, or several Jewish Apocalypses, of an earlier date. Many combinations of previous sources have been suggested, but a half century of such effort has made it clear that the critics can come to no agreement among themselves at this point. No man has been able to furnish convincing proof that his analysis of the contents of the Apocalypse into its component sources or elements is a self-evidencing or a legitimate one. Vogel, Völter, Vischer, Weyland, Weizsäcker, Spitta, Simcox, Briggs, and others have proposed elaborate schemes of dismemberment; but the general feeling at present seems to be one of reaction against such treatment, together with a growing sense of the literary beauty and unity of composition in the book. These are recognized by Weizsäcker, Sabatier, Jülicher, Gunkel, Bousset, Scott, Moffatt, and others, even while most of these feel sure that John has incorporated in his book certain portions of previous works. We agree with E. A. Abbott, who concludes, “Its peculiarities stamp the whole work—barring a few phrases—as not only conceived by one mind but also written by one hand,”¹⁰⁷ and with Moffatt, who declares, “The Apocalypse is neither a liter-

¹⁰⁶ Lectures on the Bible, vol. ii, pp. 327, 322.

¹⁰⁷ Diatessarica, 2942.

ary conglomerate nor a mechanical compilation of earlier shreds and patches. There is sufficient evidence of homogeneity in style and uniformity in treatment to indicate that one mind has been at the shaping of its oracles in their extant guise."¹⁰⁸ This seems to be a rather grudging admission, but an admission forced by the facts.

The literary unity of the Apocalypse is a most surprising fact, when we stop to think of it. We already have seen that the constituent materials of the book are drawn largely from various sources in the Old Testament. Surely, great genius was required to weld these various ingredients together into such literary symmetry and into a single product of such poetic and artistic power. This is the highest proof of originality, not the invention of absolutely new and unheard of things, but the transfiguration of old materials into higher potencies and more abundant life than they had known before. That was the originality of Shakespeare, touching up and working over the plays he found on the boards in his day. The plots were old, the characters had been seen before; but they were given new and immortal life at his touch. That was the originality of Christ, fulfilling every jot and tittle of the old law, but filling every letter of it full of new spirit and life. That was the originality of the apostle John in the composition of the Apocalypse.

These characteristics we have mentioned seem very puzzling and inconsistent to many people. This literary finish of the Apocalypse seems to be the product of the study or the cloister and hardly to be expected in an honest record of the revelations made to an ecstatic spirit, hardly such as would be written down by a rapt seer as he was borne on from vision to vision of things beyond the veil. Then if these are in reality revelations divinely given, why should they be so dependent for framework and phraseology upon

¹⁰⁸ Expositor's Greek Testament, vol. v, p. 291.

the Old Testament? Could not angelic messengers reveal something new? Could not God be absolutely original?

The answer to these questions is clear enough. God is unconditioned as to the subject matter or the manner of his revelation; but when he desires to make a revelation to man that revelation always is conditioned by the human personality. An apocalyptic vision is a psychological phenomenon; it is conditioned by the laws of the mind. A revelation to John can come to John only through the conceptions possible to him, the ideas of his age and race, the thought-materials found in his brain. As our dreams are made up of combinations of conceptions furnished us in our waking hours, and, however weird and unusual they may be in combination, every material constituent of them can be traced back to something which we have seen or heard or known before; so in the divinely granted visions of prophecy and apocalypse, by natural means as far as the human personality is concerned, following the laws of the mind, the man, still human and never for a moment lifted out of the laws of his human being, is given to know new truth through images already familiar, by methods which his training and environment make possible, in conceptions necessarily conditioned by his individuality.

Then we may look for the constituent elements of these apocalyptic visions in anything John has read or seen, anything which has come into his own previous experience. (1) Take those visions of 14. 14-20 for example: "On the cloud I *saw* one sitting like unto a son of man" (14. 14). Had not John heard the Master's saying, "Henceforth ye shall see the Son of man . . . coming in the clouds of heaven" (Matt. 26. 64)? Does the Lord wait for the angel's message before he begins to reap (14. 15)? Had not John heard his Master say, "Of that day [when the harvest of the earth is ripe] knoweth no man, . . . neither the Son, but the Father" (Mark 13. 32)? Does the angel send forth his sharp sickle to gather the clusters of the

vine of the earth (14. 18)? Had not John heard the Master say, "The reapers are angels" (Matt. 13. 39)? Here are *reminiscences of the Master's sayings* at every turn. The whole figure of the vine of the earth may have been suggested by the Lord's discourse concerning the vine and its branches (John 15), but it is more likely that Isaiah's great parable-prophecy concerning the vineyard of the Lord of hosts (Isa. 5) was the source of this imagery.

When we come to the twentieth verse, however, we meet details for which we have no parallel in the sayings of Jesus or in the Old Testament. Where did John get this conception of blood rising to the bridles of the horses? (2) We are inclined to think he had read the *book of Enoch*, for there we find the picture, "The fathers will be smitten with their sons in one place . . . until it streams with their blood like a river . . . and the horses will walk up to the breast in the blood of sinners, and the chariot will be submerged to its height" (1. 3). It looks as if Jesus and Isaiah and Enoch all had had a share in furnishing John with the elements of this vision.

(3) Dean Stanley is sure that *the natural scenery at Patmos* has had its influence upon the Apocalypse. He says: "The Discourses of the Gospels and the Epistles of Paul are raised, for the most part, too far above the local circumstances of their time, to allow of more than a very slight contact with the surrounding scenery. It is only when the teaching assumes a more directly poetic or pictorial form, as in the parables of the Gospels, or the Athenian speech of Paul, that the adjacent imagery can be expected to bear its part. But this is precisely what we might expect to find in the Apocalypse. The 'Revelation' is of the same nature as the prophetic visions and lyrical psalms of the Old Testament, where the mountains, valleys, trees, storms, earthquakes of Palestine occupy the foreground of the picture, of which the horizon extends to the unseen world and the remote future.

"For this reason I had always eagerly desired to visit the island of Patmos. I was not disappointed. The stern rugged barrenness of its broken promontories . . . and the view from its summit, with the general character of its scenery, enter into the figures of the vision itself.

"John stood on the heights of Patmos in the center of a world of his own. . . . The view from the topmost peak, or, indeed, from any lofty elevation in the island, unfolds an unusual sweep, such as well became the 'Apocalypse,' the 'unveiling' of the future to the eyes of the solitary seer. It was 'a great and high mountain' (21. 10), whence he could see things to come. Above, there was always the broad heaven of a Grecian sky; sometimes bright, with its 'white cloud' (14. 14), sometimes torn with 'lightnings and thunderings,' and darkened by 'great hail' (4. 3; 8. 7; 11. 19; 16. 21), or cheered with 'a rainbow like unto an emerald.' . . . Around him stood the mountains and the islands of the Archipelago—'every mountain and *island* shall be moved out of their places' (6. 14); 'every *island* fled away, and the *mountains* were not found' (12. 3, 9; 16. 20).

"At his feet lay Patmos itself like a huge serpent, its rocks contorted into the most fantastic and grotesque forms, which may well have suggested the 'beasts' with many heads and monstrous figures (13. 1, 21; 17. 3), the 'huge dragon,' struggling for victory—a connection as obvious as that which has often been recognized between the strange shapes on the Assyrian monuments and the prophetic symbols in the visions of Ezekiel and Daniel. When he stood 'on the sand of the sea' (13. 1), the sandy beach at the foot of the hill, he would see these strange shapes 'rise out of the sea' (13. 1), which rolled before him.

"(4) When he looked around, above, or below, '*the sea*' would always occupy the foremost place. He saw 'the things that are in the heavens and in the earth and in *the sea*' (5. 13; 10. 6; 14. 7). The angel was 'not to hurt the earth or the

sea' (7. 1-3), nor 'to blow on the earth or on *the sea*.' 'A great mountain,' like that of the volcanic Thera, 'as it were burning with fire,' was to be 'cast into *the sea*' (8. 8). The angel was to stand with his right foot *upon the sea*, and his left foot on the earth' (10. 2, 5, 8); 'the vial was to be poured out *upon the sea*' (16. 3); 'the millstone was cast into the *sea*' (18. 21); 'the *sea* was to give up the dead which were in it' (20. 13); and the time would come when this wall of his imprisonment, which girdled round the desolate island, should have ceased; 'there shall be no more *sea*' (21. 1)." ¹⁰⁹

(5) A more recent writer has developed the *volcanic theory* suggested by Stanley in considerable detail.¹¹⁰ He thinks that the tales told John of the eruption of the island volcano, Santorin, explain the pictures of Rev. 6. 12-17; 8. 7-12; 9. 1, 17, 18; 16. 2-7, 17-21. "Nothing could be more like the pit of the abyss than the crater of this volcano, and nothing better fitted to suggest demonic agency than the smoke darkening sun and air, the sulphurous vapors which killed the fish in the sea, and blinded and even killed men, the masses of molten rock cast up and falling into the sea like a great mountain or the star Wormwood, the reddening of the sea, the rise and the disappearance of islands."¹¹¹

(6) Farrar thinks that *the markets of Ephesus*, "glittering with the produce of the world's art, and the Vanity Fair of Asia, furnished to the exile of Patmos the local coloring of those pages of the Apocalypse in which he speaks of 'the merchandise of gold, and silver, and precious stones, and of pearls, and fine linen, and purple, and silk, and scarlet, and all thyine wood, and all manner vessels of ivory, and all manner vessels of most precious wood, and of brass, and iron, and marble, and cinnamon, and odors,

¹⁰⁹ Sermons in the East, pp. 268-270.

¹¹⁰ J. T. Bent, Nineteenth Century, pp. 813-821, 1888.

¹¹¹ Hastings's Bible Dictionary, vol. iv, p. 260.

and ointment, and frankincense, and wine, and oil, and fine flour, and wheat, and beasts, and sheep, and horses, and chariots, and slaves, *and souls of men*' (18. 12, 13)."¹¹²

All of this may be possible. The visions of the Apocalypse may owe something to the sights in the city of Ephesus, the volcanoes and earthquakes of Asia Minor and the Archipelago, the appearance of the Ægean Sea, and the scenery at the island of Patmos. They may owe something to what John had read in previous Apocalypses or (7) in other books, such as Tobit and the Psalms of Solomon. Moffatt says, "There are also elements akin to Zoroastrian, Babylonian, Greek, and Egyptian eschatology and cosmology not altogether derived indirectly from the apocalyptic channels of the later Judaism."¹¹³ They may contain reminiscences of the sayings of the Master. Yet the chief source of the inspiration of the Apocalypse is still to be found (8) in the books of the Old Testament. Its language is so palpably dependent upon the Old Testament books, because it is a revelation given John, whose daily diet from his earliest youth had been these same Scriptures of God. If this revelation had been given to Plato, the images and allusions in it would have been Greek. Given to John, it is Hebrew in spirit and its formulation is in the phrases and images of the sacred books of the Hebrew race.

As many of the prophecies of the Old Testament doubtless were written months or years after their first oral production and delivery, these visions of the Apocalypse doubtless were arranged in symmetrical order and given their careful literary finish in the leisure of exile or official retirement; and they are not the product of the moment of ecstasy and revelation, but the matured memory of these put into writing after they had been meditated upon until their meaning had become comparatively clear. Jülicher says, "*Ein in der Studirstube gefertigtes Kunstproduct ist*

¹¹² Life and Works of Paul, p. 355.

¹¹³ Moffatt, Introduction, p. 493.

auch diese Apokalypse," This Apocalypse is a product of art, polished in the study of the seer.¹¹⁴ Moffatt agrees, "The material to be interpreted includes the reflective working of the prophet's mind upon a previous mental condition, the literary presentment (with some expansions, rearrangement and embellishment) of what he remembers to have seen in the exalted moments of rapture, together with the impressions produced by these upon his later consciousness."¹¹⁵ The wonder of it all is that John has succeeded in putting his own stamp upon materials so variously compiled. His work is a unit and it has the stamp of genius throughout.

3. Having noticed its literary finish and dependence, we come to a third characteristic of the Apocalypse, a characteristic which it shares with the book of Daniel and other apocalyptic portions of the Old Testament. From beginning to end this book is filled with religious symbolism.

(1) First, there is the symbolism of numbers. Seven is the sacred number among the Hebrews. We remember how often this number recurs in the Old Testament: the Sabbath on the seventh day, circumcision after seven days, Hannah's praise that the barren had borne seven (1 Sam. 2. 5), the blood sprinkled seven times before the veil of the sanctuary (Lev. 4. 6, 17), the seven days of consecration (Lev. 8. 33), purification on the seventh day (Num. 19. 12), the prophecy that enemies shall flee in seven ways (Deut. 28. 7), the punishment of seven times more plagues (Lev. 26. 21, 24, 28), the promise of sevenfold vengeance (Gen. 4. 15), the seven years of plenty and the seven years of famine in Egypt (Gen. 41. 53, 54), the Nile smitten for seven days (Exod. 7. 25), Jericho compassed seven days and on the seventh day seven times, and the walls falling at the signal of the seven priests blowing upon the

¹¹⁴ Einleitung, p. 168.

¹¹⁵ Expositor's Greek Testament, vol. v, p. 300.

seven trumpets (Josh. 6. 3, 4), Naaman dipping in the Jordan seven times (2 Kings 5. 10). The whole system of Jewish feasts, the Passover, the Feast of Weeks, the Feast of Tabernacles, the Sabbath-year, the year of Jubilee, was built up on the number seven and its multiples.

This sacred number is carried over into the New Testament where we find in the Sermon on the Mount the seven beatitudes, and the seven petitions of the Lord's Prayer, the seven successive parables of the Kingdom in Matt. 13, the seven words from the cross, the seven deacons in Jerusalem, the seven gifts of grace (Rom. 12. 6-8), the seven characteristics of wisdom (James 3. 17). But it is in the Apocalypse that the symbolic use of the number seven becomes most apparent. It underlies the whole construction of the book.

There are seven clear divisions in the Introduction of the first chapter; the Inscription, 1-3; the Address, 4-6; the Parousia, 7; the Attestator, 8; the conditions of composition, Author, Time, and Place, 9; the Vision, 10-16; the Voice or the Command, 17-20. There are seven descriptive statements touching the Christophany; concerning the clothing, girdle, head, hair, eyes, feet, and voice. Also, there are seven different sayings of the Living One himself. Seven characteristics of the scourging locusts are mentioned. We are sure that there is a sevenfold division of the book as a whole. Weiss finds that there are seven distinct visions in the body of the book. There are seven beatitudes in the Apocalypse: 1. 3; 14. 13; 19. 9; 20. 6; 22. 7, 14.

There are the seven churches, the seven seals, the seven trumpets, the seven vials, the seven Spirits, the seven stars, the seven candlesticks, the seven lamps of fire, the seven horns and seven eyes of the Lamb, the seven heads of the dragon and the seven heads of the beast, the seven diadems, the seven names of blasphemy, the seven plagues, the seven angels, the seven thunders, the seven hills of

mystic Babylon, the seven kings, the seven thousand men. The number seven occurs fifty-four times in the book.

We are told that the number seven is the sacred number, the perfect number, the number of completeness or rest; and that it represents the Divine or the perfectly complete. Milligan says, "It is the number of unity in diversity, of unity in that manifoldness of operation which alone entitles it to the name of unity."¹¹⁶ Upon this basis he goes on to declare that "the seven Spirits of God are his one Spirit; the seven churches, his one church; the seven horns and the seven eyes of the Lamb, his one powerful might and his one penetrating glance. In like manner the seven Seals, the seven Trumpets, and the seven Bowls embody the thought of many judgments which are yet in reality one."¹¹⁷

This number seven sometimes breaks up into three and four or four and three. In the seven epistles, in the first three the exhortation, "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches," comes in the middle of the letter, and in the last four it comes at the very close. The first three are closer to the Divine; and the last four are closer to the world. In the first four seals, a rider appears when each seal is broken; in the breaking of the last three no rider appears and the vision passes from the visible into the spiritual world. There are seven seals, and after the breaking of each of the first four the seer is summoned to come near, but in the last three this summons fails. The seven trumpets are distinguished in the same two groups, and the last three are expressly called Woes. The first four affect nature, and the last three affect men. The seven bowls fall into the same divisions; the plagues of the first three are received in silence, while after the pouring forth of the last four there are voices and blasphemies and unclean spirits from the mouths of God's foes.

We read that the broken seven, three and one half, is

¹¹⁶ Expositor's Bible, p. 28.

¹¹⁷ *Op. cit.*, p. 136.

the symbol of the confusion and trouble of the last age; and that the number of the beast, six hundred and sixty-six, is the symbol of protracted labor, never reaching rest.

The number four is the cosmic number, the number of the world and of creation, represented in the Apocalypse by the four living creatures of 4. 6, and the four angels and four winds of 7. 1, the four angels of death in 9. 15, and the four-square cube of the New Jerusalem.

The number three occurs in the trinitarian greeting of 1. 4, the three woes of 11. 14, the three angels of 14. 6, the three unclean spirits of 16. 13, the three divisions of the great city, 16. 19, and the three portals in each wall of the heavenly city.

Ten with its multiples is the symbol of abundance. It equals $1+2+3+4$, and is found in the ten days of tribulation (2. 10), the ten horns of the dragon and of the beast (13. 1 and 17. 3); and the millennium (20. 4).

Twelve with its multiples is the number of the church, and we find it recurring in the twelve stars in the woman's crown (12. 1), the twelve apostles, the twelve foundations, the twelve gates of the New Jerusalem, the names of the twelve tribes upon these gates and the twelve angels to guard them (chapter 21), the twelve manner of fruits on the tree of life (22. 2), the twenty-four elders (4. 4), and the one hundred and forty-four thousand of those who were sealed, twelve thousand for each of the twelve tribes of Israel (7. 1). Each side of the heavenly city is twelve thousand furlongs in length, and its wall is one hundred and forty-four cubits high.

This symbolism in the use of numbers is so plain that it cannot be denied; and the moment it is recognized all attempts to figure out any definite dates for the end of the world or the millennium or the great tribulation or the second coming of the Lord become at once both useless and absurd. The Apocalypse never was intended to serve as an Adventist's almanac. Its figures are symbolic, and

do not represent any definite dimensions of space or any definite periods of time. They are to be interpreted as ideas, and are not to be disposed of by a school-boy's arithmetic.

The thousand years of the millennium "express no period of time. They are not a figure for the whole Christian era, now extending to more than nineteen hundred years. Nor do they denote a certain space of time, longer or shorter, it may be, than the definite number of years spoken of, at the close of the present dispensation, and to be in the view of some preceded, in the view of others followed, by the second Advent of our Lord. They embody an idea; and that idea, whether applied to the subjugation of Satan or to the triumph of the saints, is the idea of completeness or perfection. Satan is bound for a thousand years; that is, he is completely bound. The saints reign for a thousand years; that is, they are introduced into a state of perfect and glorious victory."¹¹⁸

Does any one think of the new Jerusalem as a real city, fifteen hundred English miles long and fifteen hundred miles wide, and fifteen hundred miles high? John says, "The length and the breadth and the height thereof are equal, twelve thousand furlongs each."¹¹⁹ Some of the commentators have tried to picture it as a city built about a mountain with a base of these dimensions and the tiers of streets and houses rising to that height on the mountain sides; but that is not John's picture. He makes the city a perfect cube; for the holy place in the temple at Jerusalem was a perfect cube and it was the place of the immediate manifestation of God. Every part of the heavenly city would be equally filled with the revealed presence of the Most High. It was to be a holy place throughout. The cube symbolized that, and its size suggested that the holy city would be one of almost incredibly

¹¹⁸ Milligan, *op. cit.*, p. 337.

¹¹⁹ 21. 16.

ample proportions, from which no one need be excluded for lack of room.

Does anyone think that a real city seven million feet in height would have a wall about it only two hundred and sixteen feet high?¹²⁰ Such a wall would be utterly insignificant in comparison with such a city. These are only symbols; and if a wall about a city was a symbol of defense there was no need of even the most insignificant wall about this city. God was its sure defense: and all its enemies had been overcome. Were its gates open all the day and was there no night there?¹²¹ The open gates were the symbol of perfect security and peace. All danger was at an end: all darkness had passed away for evermore.

Does any one think that the number which John heard of the cavalry which served the four angels loosed at the Euphrates is to be taken literally? They were two hundred million in number, twice ten thousand times ten thousand.¹²² The number symbolizing abundance was multiplied by itself until the sum had reached an inconceivable total. Is any one disposed to believe that when the great winepress of the wrath of God is trodden without the city there will flow from it a literal river of blood so deep that it will reach to the bridles of the horses and so long that it will extend to two hundred miles? The picture is that of immeasurable destruction, a punishment thorough and complete.

Does any one think that in the new heaven and the new earth there will be no ocean and no salt sea, because John says, "The first heaven and the first earth are passed away; and the sea is no more"?¹²³ We would sympathize with the wail of Kipling's mariners, if that were true. To John the sea was a symbol of unrest, of storm and shipwreck, and of separation. He looked away across the troubled waves which lashed his island of exile, and

¹²⁰ 21. 17.

¹²² Rev. 9. 16.

¹²¹ 21. 25.

¹²³ 21. 1.

dreamed of the good time coming when no such barrier would keep the saints of God from the enjoyment of communion with each other. In the new heaven and the new earth there would be no shipwrecks and there would be union and communion and perfect peace.

Where do the waters of the river of life flow, if not into the sea? How could the renewed earth maintain itself without the gracious ministries of the sea? Do not the heavenly victors with their harps of gold stand by the crystal sea, as they sing the song of Moses and the Lamb?¹²⁴ The sea is a symbol to John, now of the spiritual barrenness of the heathen world,¹²⁵ and now of the separating barrier between brethren beloved,¹²⁶ and now again of the resplendent glories of heaven.¹²⁷

He had stood upon some cliff at Patmos and heard the roar of the breakers as they shattered themselves upon the rocks; and in his visions he had been reminded of it, for the voice of his risen Lord reverberated through all the chambers of his soul even as that sea music had, and he wrote that his voice was as the voice of many waters.¹²⁸ He had stood upon the sandy shore and looked off toward the setting sun, until the reflected glories had dazzled his eyes and the quiet expanse of waters had burned as with red flame to their translucent depths; and when he came to see the throne of God there stretched between him and it that same sea as of glass, clear as crystal, and mingled with fire.¹²⁹ The sea is a symbol of sorrow and sin: and as such the time is coming when it shall be no more. The sea is a symbol of divine majesty and of the unspeakable glories of heaven; and as such it has an abiding place in John's visions of the future world.

(2) This symbolism in the Apocalypse is equally apparent in the use made of colors. White is the color of purity

¹²⁴ 15. 2.

¹²⁷ 15. 2.

¹²⁵ 13. 1.

¹²⁸ 1. 15.

¹²⁶ 21. 1.

¹²⁹ 4. 6; 15. 2.

in the white garments of the redeemed; of righteousness as well as purity in the white throne; of righteousness, purity, and victory in the white horse of the Conqueror near the end of the book. Red is the symbol of bloodshed; purple, of imperial power; black, of mourning and distress; paleness, of fear.

(3) There are symbolic creatures all through the book. The living creatures of the fourth chapter symbolize the redeemed creation. The Lamb is the symbol of the Sufferer for the sins of the world. Frogs represent unclean spirits. Locusts are the symbols of all things which waste and destroy. The wild beast is incarnated cruelty, an apotheosis of diabolical power.

(4) There are symbolic acts, such as the sealing and the unsealing, the blowing of trumpets, and the pressing out of the wine.

(5) "All that is brilliant in nature—the glitter of the sun or of gold, the luster of precious stones or of pearls—becomes an emblem of the divine glory; all that is terrible in nature—lightning and thunder, the roar of the tempest and the whirlwind, hail and earthquake—emblems of divine justice."¹³⁰ "The horns are symbolical of power, the eyes of omniscience, the diadem of supremacy, garlands and palms of victory, incense of prayer."

XV. SALIENT FEATURES OF ITS TEACHING

The Apocalypse, then, is a book full of poetic imagery and symbolism. We have said that it was at the same time a book of profound philosophy and full of religious truth. Let us glance at some of the salient features of its teaching.

1. First of all it is a revelation of heavenly powers. What would we know of heaven without this book? The best way to realize the value of a book is to think how

¹³⁰ Weiss, p. 65.

much we would lose if we were deprived of it. We would have some gleams of light from beyond the veil without the Apocalypse, but our conceptions of the heavenly happiness and home would be very misty indeed. Our knowledge of the life after this is meager enough as it is, but without the Apocalypse it would be much more meager than now. Heaven would have seemed far removed without the revelation of this book. Now we know that heaven is very near to earth ; and the gates of heaven are open ; and the eternal interests of heaven and earth are seen to be one.

The inhabitants of heaven are supremely interested in the fortunes and fate of the citizens of earth. They have one book to study, a book sealed with seven seals, and each seal represents a stage of development in the advancing history of the redemption of earth. Heavenly powers pass to and fro between earth and heaven. Spiritual agencies are active in shaping the course of things and determining the final outcome of events. With the revelation of this book the eye of faith can see the whole earth filled with horses and chariots of fire, like the mountain there at Dothan ; and, like Elisha, the believing soul always can say, "They that are with us are more than they that are with them."¹³¹ We need the inspiration of this revelation ; for the powers of evil assuredly are at hand. It is a comfort to know that the powers of heaven are here too ; and in our hour of greatest need they are pledged to intervene in our behalf. Luther did not much like the Apocalypse : but even he acknowledges this good in it. He said, "We need not doubt that Christ is near and with us, even if matters go hardest ; as we see in this book that through and above all plagues, beasts, evil angels, Christ is still near and with his saints, and at last overthrows them."

2. In the second place, this book is the clearest revelation in the Bible of the essence of evil, the powers of evil, and

¹³¹ 2 Kings 6. 16.

the final judgment of the devil and sin. Bishop Warren has told us, "Anyone who needs to realize that sin is a horrible, ghastly, hideous, and unnamable thing, that has taxed and will tax the highest energies of the universe to manage and control it, will find his needed aid in this book."¹³² Here is "the wrath of God and the Lamb against it. . . . Our age has weakened on the vivid idea of the Judgment. Here is the tonic. . . . See the plagues, noisome and grievous sores, rivers of blood, men scorched with fire, gnawing their tongues with pain as they blaspheme God. . . . Perdition and damnation welter over these pages, for sin is and always must be accursed."¹³³

It is a characteristic of the apostle John's style that he always arranges his matter into antithetic parallelism. Over against the hosts of heaven he has put the powers of hell in this book. Over against the adorable and Divine Trinity he has placed the "Triad of Anti-Christianity," as it has been called, the blasphemous Trinity of the pit. He gives us the two sides of the picture: heaven and the abyss, the heavenly city and the harlot city, the armies of the saints and the armies of the idolaters, Michael and the dragon, the Spirit of truth and the spirit who deceives, the Lamb and the wild beast, the Father of lights and the father of lies.

3. We scarcely need to say, in the third place, that the Apocalypse is a picture of ceaseless conflict between these two. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit with their followers are on the one side; the dragon, the wild beast, and the false prophet with their followers are on the other. There is no truce between these hosts. It is a long and desperate struggle which John sees in the visions of this book, a struggle which he pictures in war and desolation, famine and pestilence, tempest and earthquake. John is a Boanerges here. It is the Son of Thunder who indites

¹³² Iliff School Studies, p. 38.

¹³³ *Idem.*, p. 37.

these magnificent revelations. De Wette said that it was the Old Testament spirit of wrath and punishment which filled the book. We think rather that it is an appreciation of the eternal truth that there can be no peace nor compromise in earth or heaven, in time or in eternity, between righteousness and unrighteousness, light and darkness, Christ and Belial. The noun "war" occurs in the Apocalypse nine times and in the rest of the New Testament only seven times. The verb "to war" occurs in this book six times; and in the rest of the New Testament only once.¹³⁴

4. We want to say next that the conflict of this book ends in glorious victory for the right and the good. Milton describes the book as "the majestic image of a high and stately tragedy, shutting up and mingling her solemn scenes and acts with a sevenfold chorus of hallelujahs and harping symphonies." Dean Farrar has written: "It is a book of war, but the war ends in triumph and peace. It is a book of thunder, but the thunder dies away into liturgies and psalms." The Lamb in this book is a Conqueror. The followers of the Lamb at last are Overcomers. The word is characteristic of John's usage. It is found once in the Gospel, six times in the First Epistle, and sixteen times in the Apocalypse, and elsewhere in the New Testament only three times.¹³⁵ The promises of this book are made to Overcomers alone; the realization of the promises is enjoyed only by these.¹³⁶ The struggle of earth is followed by triumph in heaven. Christ is the Great Overcomer. The redeemed are soldiers, fighters, Overcomers too. They have faced the foe, borne the toil, endured the pain, and conquered in the glorious war. Here all the armies shine in robes of victory through the skies. "The panorama of each individual that overcometh and of the church as a whole is sketched in advance. And the last picture is of

¹³⁴ James 4. 2.

¹³⁵ Luke 11. 22; Rom. 3. 4; 12. 21.

¹³⁶ 2. 7; 2. 11; 2. 17; 2. 26; 3. 5; 3. 12; 3. 21; 21. 7; 12. 11.

complete, splendid, unthinkably glorious and eternal victory.”¹³⁷

5. Shall we add that this book teaches very definitely that this final triumph is made possible only through the shed blood of the Lamb? The doctrine of redemption by blood does not seem to have been revolting to John. Saints sing of it. Angels speak of it. Redemption, cleansing, victory is all through the blood.

XVI. HOW TO READ THE APOCALYPSE

Now let us recall what was promised there in I. 3, “Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of the prophecy, and keep the things that are written therein.” Let us read this book, as Dr. Alexander said he read it, for the promised and realized blessing; though he did not pretend to understand it. I am no professional astronomer. I know very little indeed of the mysteries of the heavens above me. Yet I enjoy the starlight and moonlight and sunlight just as surely as if I understood all about them. I walk beneath the stars until their light breaks in upon my soul; I stand beneath the silent heavens until their peace fills my heart. I am blessed by communion with these things on high, even though I do not comprehend them.

You remember Victor Hugo’s picture of the good bishop in his garden at night: “He was there alone with himself, collected, tranquil, adoring, comparing the serenity of his heart with the serenity of the skies, moved in the darkness by the visible splendors of the constellations, and the invisible splendor of God, opening his soul to the thoughts which fall from the Unknown. In such moments, offering up his heart at the hour when the flowers of night exhale their perfume, lighted like a lamp in the center of the starry night, expanding his soul in ecstasy in the midst of the

¹³⁷ Bishop Warren, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

universal radiance of creation, he could not himself perhaps have told what was passing in his own mind; he felt something depart from him, and something descend upon him; mysterious interchanges of the depths of the soul with the depths of the universe. He contemplated the grandeur and the presence of God; the eternity of the future, strange mystery; the eternity of the past, mystery yet more strange; all the infinities deep hidden in every direction about him; and, without essaying to comprehend the incomprehensible, he saw it.”¹³⁸

It is exactly in this spirit that I would read the Apocalypse. Here are infinite depths, heavenly splendors, dazzling revelations of truth; strange mysteries of eternity future and eternity past; incomprehensible, but incomparably blessed. The chapters of this book are like the heaven studded with stars; in their presence I am exalted, quieted, comforted, made a partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and patience which are in Jesus, my Lord. This book is a perfect arsenal of inspiration for the sturdily striving saint. It gives no sanction to dreaminess, luke-warmness, or inaction. One reason why it has failed of appreciation with some people is that they were too much at ease in Zion. Its message is to the struggling and aspiring soul. To the Christian warrior it gives the stimulus of hope and the assurance of present divine aid and future eternal victory.

The church has passed through periods of great persecution, when under the stress of its fiery trial all hope would have died, if it had not been for this book. Martyrs could go to the stake with the book of Revelation in their hands. Despair was impossible with the promises of the Apocalypse. Dr. Chambers has said, “The scope of this mysterious book is not to convince unbelievers, nor to illustrate the divine prescience, nor to minister to men’s

¹³⁸ Les Misérables, p. 37.

prudent desire to peer into the future, but to edify the disciples of Christ in every age by unfolding the nature and character of earth's conflicts, by preparing them for trial as not a strange thing, by consoling them with the prospect of victory, by assuring them of God's sovereign control over all persons and things, and by pointing them to the ultimate issue when they shall pass through the gates of pearl never more to go out."¹³⁹

Benjamin M. Adams was one of the saints of the last generation. We are told that when he had to preach on Sunday morning he usually spent two hours in prayer and in reading the book of Revelation through from beginning to end, and in that way he read the book through nearly twelve hundred times in the course of his ministry. He said he wanted to see how the fight was coming out, how the conflict was to end, before he went into the pulpit. He said the city of the rainbows and the hallelujahs inspired him for his pulpit work. The Apocalypse of John is full of inspiration for such spirits as his. Our greatest need is the need of spiritual help. The whole Bible was intended to furnish that. No book in the Bible is richer in its supply of spiritual inspiration and aid than is this last book in the list. The Bible is a revelation of God. No book in the Bible gives a clearer revelation of the God of eternity who fights for and with his people through time and dwells with them in heaven.

We ought not to abuse this book by forcing its immensities into our finite measures. Its events are not to be calendared by years and months and days; its imagery is not to be reduced by mathematical calculation to any simple sum of æons, periods, centuries. John was in the Spirit when these revelations were made to him. We must be in the Spirit before the revelation can come to us. It is a revelation to spiritual need. It is a book for devotional

¹³⁹ Schaff, Apostolic Christianity, p. 831.

use. As Herder says, it has "manna for all hearts and all ages." It is "a book of instruction and comfort for all churches in which Christ walks." Bengel said we ought to read it "as candidates for eternity."

We ought not to neglect it, as too many Christians in these days do. We always will find perplexities in it. There are some passages which will be made plain only when we get to heaven. Yet we ought to read it for present spiritual admonition and inspiration; and we will find it an inexhaustible source of spiritual blessing. We might put that motto on the front flyleaf of our Bibles, as applicable to the whole book, "Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of the prophecy, and keep the things that are written therein"; but let us remember that what is true of the whole book is said explicitly and directly to be true of this last book of the Bible. Let us believe it true of this revelation; let us read and remember, let us hear and keep the words of this prophecy, and we will find them words of spiritual life.

XVII. A FITTING END OF THE BIBLE

Let us notice in closing that this book forms a fitting end of the Bible. It was not the last book written, but it was one of the last books to be admitted to our New Testament list and it stands last in our English canon; and we are glad to acknowledge that it is most suitable that a book with these characteristics should occupy this place. We suggest three reasons why the Apocalypse fitly stands in this position in our Bible and in our New Testament.

i. We already have seen that the warp and woof of the material form and substance of the Apocalypse is furnished by the Old Testament Scriptures. Its images and allusions, its framework and phrases are to be traced to the visions and prophecies, the histories and hymns of the Hebrew Holy Book. This fact is so evident that this book has been

called "a rhetorical résumé of previous Scripture." It is a prophetic summary of all which has been said by holy men of old as they were moved by the Holy Ghost. "While the eagle mind of John soars with apparent license, his track through the azure is found to be as carefully selected as that of the ox lining the furrow. The sacred poet is also the plodding student, picking his way through prescribed data. The rein of restraint and guidance is always tight upon the neck of his Pegasus. He seems at every moment conscious that he is making what mankind will come to use as the closing book of the Sacred Canon—a volume that must fit, in order to finish, the whole scheme of revealed truth. So he gathers up the threads of prophecy, spun through various ages, and from varying minds, and combines them all into one glowing node.

"What impressiveness does this fact give to all the words, the warnings, the appeals, the promises, in this closing book! John does not speak from himself alone, from his own heart, swelling with solicitude and love for his fellow men, from his own heaven-filled spirit; but his human voice commingles with the voices of holy men of all ages. When he warns, it is with the alarum which has shaken men with fear in all generations. When he pleads, it is with the love of all the grand hearts that have ever loved their kind and given their lives for love's sake. When he promises, he brings together—as it were, melts together—the many seals of certainty which God has set to his truth in the consciousness of his prophets from the beginning of the world."¹⁴⁰

The book of Revelation represents the last residuum of the inspiration and revelation of the whole Bible. It is the Elisha upon whom the mantle of previous prophecy has fallen; a double portion of the Spirit of prophecy which is the testimony of Jesus is in it. It fitly crowns the revelation of the entire Scripture; and from the topmost pinnacle

¹⁴⁰ James M. Ludlow, Homiletic Review, vol. ix, p. 214.

of outlook found in the book it unfurls its banner with the last inscription, the final prayer and praise of the struggling, suffering, believing, and triumphant church, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus." The whole continuity of Scripture in this final revelation finds its summarization, its magnificent and appropriate close.

2. The book of Revelation is not only a Ruth gleaning through all the fields of gold belonging to the family inheritance in the past. It is also a Ruth who goes on from the heat and burden and privation of the former days to the marriage supper and the rejoicing in the full possession of the inheritance in the harvest home. It is a fitting close to the Bible because here, as Donald Fraser has said, "At last the patience of patriarchs and saints is rewarded; the longings of Israel and the church are fulfilled; and the glory of God shines unhindered on a scene of righteousness and peace."

Canon Bernard, in his Bampton Lectures, has suggested: "Take from the Bible the final vision of the heavenly Jerusalem, and what will have been lost? Not merely a single passage, a sublime description, an important revelation, but a conclusion by which all that went before is interpreted and justified. We should have an unfinished plan, in which human capacities have not found their full realization, or divine preparations their adequate result. . . . Revelation decrees not only the individual happiness, but the corporate perfection of man, and closes the book of its prophecy by assuring the children of the living God that he hath prepared for them a city."¹⁴¹

This last book of prophecy in the Bible justifies and explains some of the unfulfilled prophecies of the older books. These prophecies are not null and void. They but wait for the fullness of time. The first three chapters of Genesis demand the last three chapters of Revelation. They are

¹⁴¹ The Progress of Doctrine, pp. 219, 220.

complementary to each other. The one is needed for the justification and explanation of the other. In Genesis we read of the creation of the heaven and the earth, and then of the marriage of Adam and Eve, and then of the serpent and the temptation and the fall. In the closing chapters of Revelation we come upon the complementary events, following each other in the reverse order. First, the old serpent is fitly punished, for he is chained and cast into the bottomless pit. He is rendered harmless forever; for he never can get loose from his chains and he never will reach the bottom of the pit. Then we read of the marriage of the Lamb and the Bride, the second Adam and the church redeemed by his blood. Then there is that most sublime vision of the new heaven and the new earth, in which God dwells with the saints and the saints dwell in eternal life and light and love. If we had only the revelation of the first three chapters of Genesis, we might well despair. But with the revelation of the last three chapters of the Apocalypse we live in hope. The Divine Book finds here its fitting close; for now the divine plan is manifest in its concluded symmetry.

3. We notice last how this book terminates. In the last chapter and the last verse, we read, "The grace of the Lord Jesus be with the saints. Amen."¹⁴² It is the fitting benediction, not for this book only but for the whole Word of God. The last word in the Old Testament canon was that word "curse"; "lest I come and smite the earth with a curse."¹⁴³ The New Testament closes with a sweeter word, the word "grace." As the book forms a fitting close to the canon of the Covenants, Old and New, so this sentence forms a fitting close to this book and all the books.

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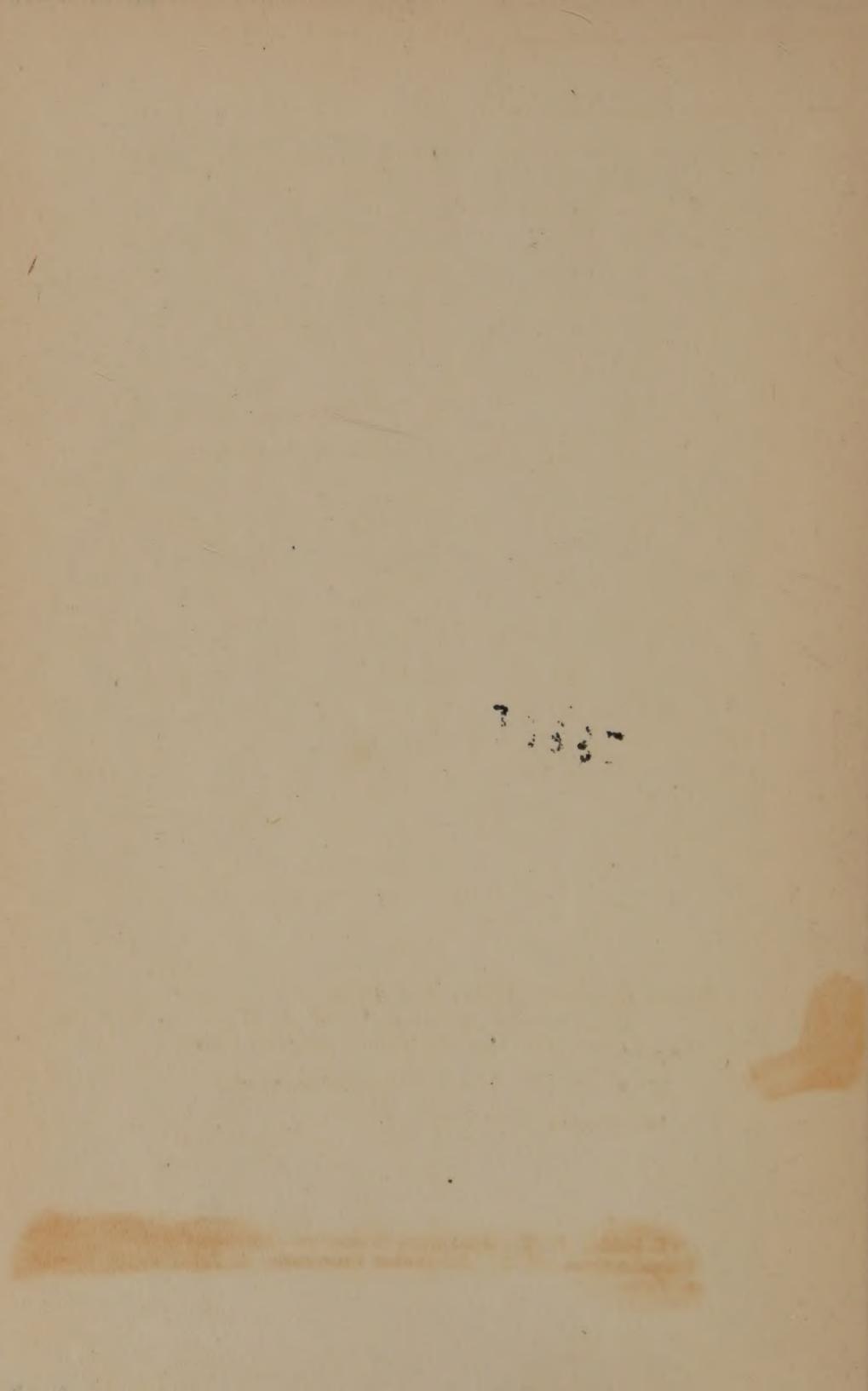
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